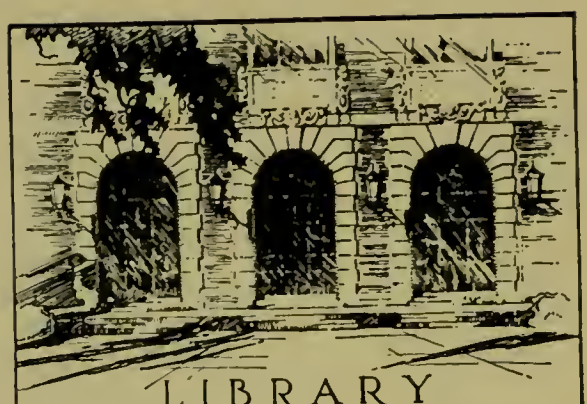

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NATHALIE;

A TALE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "WOMAN IN FRANCE," "MADELEINE," &c.

A creature not too pure or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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NATHALIE.

CHAPTER I.

There was nothing querulous or complaining in the character of Nathalie. She was not patient: she might often revolt against her fate, but she disdained to lament it. Her nature was too fiery and too vehement ever to verge into the weakness of repining.

She had poured out her heart to Rose, because it was then full even to overflowing; the confidence had relieved her, but having once told her sister all with the most unreserved freedom, she thought this sufficient, and did not so much as dream of again renewing the subject. Rose was surprised; she had not expected this. She watched her sister anxiously. Nathalie was certainly pale and did not seem in good health; but her features were more serious than sad.

When she rose in the morning, she had the worn look of one who has spent a sleepless night; yet her eyes never seemed dimmed by weeping, nor did her pale cheeks bear any trace of tears. This faculty of subduing the external signs of sorrow alarmed Rose. It revealed a strength of character she had not suspected, but it also made her fear that what she had considered as a mere girlish passion, was one of those deeper feelings whose ill-repressed fever wastes the pure freshness of youth and poisons the source of a whole existence. On the third day she asked Nathalie when she intended to give Madame Marceau her final answer.

"When the ten days I asked for are elapsed," briefly replied Nathalie, evidently not disposed to continue the conversation on this subject.

This proud and obstinate silence ended by alarming Rose. She resolved to break through it.

"Nathalie," said she to her one morning, "that pride of yours will kill you. You suffer, but are too haughty to complain."

"Be easy," returned Nathalie, with a gesture not free from disdain, "and fear not for my health. Take my word for it, Rose, it is only the mentally and physically weak some sorrows kill. Those who have strength to feel, have strength to endure, to suffer, and live on."

"But why be so proud?" urged Rose.

"I am not proud," calmly replied her sister, "but I am no love-sick maiden. I am simply an unloved woman who has no right to complain, who will endure silently, wrap courage like a mantle around her, and say, 'none shall see that I sorrow.'"

"But I see it," returned Rose, "you have lifted the veil from your heart and cannot drop it again; and if you had never raised that veil, I should not the less have seen through it. Look at that book which, to please me, you have promised to read; it is still turned down at the same page; look at that task which you took in hand before yesterday; it is not half done; yet you are of an active disposition, and were fond of reading once."

"Yes, once, Rose."

"Why not now?"

"Because books, ay even the most excellent, could not now take me out of myself or be my spirit's home. I have reached that time of life when dreams end and reality opens; when the mind grows weary of always imagining, and wishes to live for truth. I know you think me too fond of day-dreams and romances: you would not think so could you know how I long, how I thirst for truth and reality."

She spoke in a feverish tone, and pressed her hand to her forehead. Rose bent over her, and laid her hand on Nathalie's shoulder.

"You long for truth," said she, "turn towards divine truths."

There was a brief silence. Nathalie at length looked up into her sister's face, now calmly bending over her; the young girl's eyes were tearless, but deeply mournful.

"Rose," she very sadly replied, "I know what you mean, even as you knew what I meant. But the truth for which I long is not, alas, the truth towards which you bid me turn. What will you think of me when I tell you that my soul, my heart, my very flesh cleave to this earth; that, do what I will, I cannot tear them away. I know the divine Master to whose feet you would lead me; I have heard him saying 'Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' I have struggled against my yearning heart and its unavailing wishes; I have raised my soul in prayer, and besought for aid throughout the silent night, and my burden has not been taken from me, and I have never won repose."

"Is there no comfort in Christian resignation: in saying, this is the will of God?"

Rose spoke with serious gentleness; but Nathalie smiled somewhat bitterly.

"There are different natures," she said, at length; "some are submissive, like yours, Rose; but mine is not, and has never been. When did I bear sorrow patiently? I am young, impulsive, and energetic; life now flows in me in its fullest and strongest tide, and that is why I suffer keenly. If I were weak or passive, I should either die or forget; the latter most probably: but being as I am, I cannot do either. I must live, remember, and suffer still; for I am of those rebellious spirits who think they were made for happiness."

"Do you doubt the goodness of God, the justice of his providence?" gravely asked Rose.

"No, that would be impious and foolish; but to acknowledge that God is good, that his providence is just, does not remove the bitterness of my sorrow. Religion and Reason both tell me 'suffer patiently;' but there is a voice in my heart which revolts against this, which cries out incessantly: 'Why, oh! why must I suffer?'"

"Oh! Nathalie," very sorrowfully said her sister; "you have dreamed too much, you have read too many of those books which waste for ever the divine freshness of the heart."

Nathalie shook her head, and smiled.

"How strangely you talk," she replied, "one might think love had been invented by novels and novelists. Would it not exist without them? Is it not something more than a human creation? Oh, Rose! that you, in many things so wise, should yet not see that the heart is, and ever must be, its own most impassioned and most dangerous romance—that love is no weakness, but a most divine thing!"

"Idolater! Idolater!" sadly murmured Rose.

"I am no idolater: love is divine."

"But, Nathalie, is not passion, which is but the fever of love, too often confounded with love itself; and what is the purest affection but the dream of youth's brief years?"

"Then what was the heart given us for, Rose?"

"Not for an idol. Shall we for ever hear of the heart and hear so little of the soul? It is beautiful to see two human beings loving one another with truth and tenderness; but when I behold idolaters kneeling to clay as fragile as their own, I turn away my glance with sorrow, and wish them a purer worship."

"But you would make life too cold," replied Nathalie. "I have suffered from a mind too restless, from a heart too eager in its longings, yet I would

not change my sorrows for so placid and passionless an existence as that you would have us lead."

"And is there then no deep feeling, save one?" asked Rose, whilst a faint tinge of colour rose to her pale cheek; "is there no such feeling as duty, no such passion as the passion of its accomplishment?"

"Oh, Rose!" said Nathalie, looking up into her sister's face, "you are perfect; but to be as you are, bearing all, feeling nothing, would be a living death to me; I can suffer, if it needs must be so, but at least let me live. Believe me, we are not calm; calmness is not human; life is a running stream, forced repose breeds stagnation. Hide it as we will, we carry within us the germ of restless longings; a fever of the heart which nothing can satiate or appease. Vague desires for some undefined good haunt even our happiest moments. If there are some who have never felt this, over whose joy a shade of sadness has never come, even in its very fulness; who have endured sorrow without the bitterness of one moment's despair, may I never meet them; they are not human,—they have no heart."

She spoke with passionate eagerness.

"Oh, child!" sorrowfully said her sister, "what a fever you would make of life; life is a running stream indeed, but one that bears us to the divine repose of the grave."

"The repose of the grave!" echoed Nathalie; "do you then believe in that unnatural calm, which is all we actually know of death? I do not, Rose, I do not. No, I do not think that life's fitful story ends with six feet of earth, and that beneath that cold stone, the heart lies still. There are, there must be feelings and passions that conquer even death, and snatch its triumph from the grave. Who has come back to tell us how much exactly it is that dies, how much that lives? The soul, you will say! I ask who told you that the heart would perish? It cannot be merely the principle of life that survives; it must be life itself, Rose, life exalted, purified if you will; but life with the same feelings and burning thoughts that formed a part of its being here below."

"And you thus feed yourself with thoughts of the eternity of your feelings," sorrowfully replied Rose; "and you think that your love, that perishable dream, endures for ever. Believe me—and yet no, you will not believe me—it lasts but a day."

"You say this to comfort me," said Nathalie, looking up; "strange comfort! Do not tell me that I shall ever be cured, do not weaken my faith in the truth of what I feel. I know sorrow is painful, but to think that our sorrow, though now so deep, shall pass away, that a time will come when we

shall smile at the past, may be true, but it is too bitter. Are we so weak, that our griefs are of as frail and perishable a nature as our being? I will not believe it; I will have faith in the eternity of sorrow, that I may have faith in the eternity of its source; I will believe that what loves and suffers in me is not the perishable clay, but the immortal spirit."

"Idolater, idolater," again murmured Rose, "do you think I do not see how all your thoughts are with him?"

The head of Nathalie drooped, and her cheeks flushed.

"You see much, Rose," she replied, in a low tone, "but not all; you do not, cannot know the pictures that haunt me. When I close my eyes thus, with my brow leaning on my hand, visions are before me. I see myself sitting at noon in the lime-tree avenue; the shade is so thick that no ray of sun can pierce it; the whole avenue is filled with a cool, green light, which makes the sunny landscape beyond look like one long line of golden and dazzling light passing behind the trunks of the lime-trees. Why, will you say, do I remember this? because as I sit there reading he has passed by; he has not stopped to speak; I

have not raised my eyes from the book, yet the memory of that moment lives in me still. And it is so with all in which he ever had a part. I remember every word of our first interview; every incident of that first evening in the drawing-room, when the regular fall of his footsteps on the floor blended with the sound of the wind and rain without, and I secretly wondered what sort of a man he was. I never knew until now, what memory really is; for it is thus with me all day long, and all through the watches of the night. I am ever haunted by pictures of the past, by looks, smiles, and kind words, that shall never return for me. I see fireside scenes at twilight time, ere the lamp is lit, and when the ruddy light falls on the hearth; garden scenes, with all the warmth, the brightness of summer's noon-day, have come back; and so strong and vivid is the impression thus received, that when I look up, when I see this cold room, so chill and dreary, with nothing but the monotonous ticking of the clock to break on its silence, I often ask myself is this the dream? was that the reality?"

Rose made no reply; the conversation dropped, and was not renewed.

On the eve of that tenth day which was to be that of Nathalie's final answer, Amanda very unex-

pectedly called. Madame Marceau, she said, was much worse, and wished to see mademoiselle immediately. Indeed, the *femme-de-chambre* hinted pretty clearly that her mistress, who now kept her room, was wellnigh in a dying condition. Nathalie felt infinitely shocked, and did not hesitate to comply with the request. At first she was somewhat disturbed by the thought of meeting either Monsieur de Sainville or his nephew, but on their way to the *château,* Amanda informed her that both were away.

"What! whilst Madame Marceau is so ill?" exclaimed Nathalie, with much surprise.

"Yes, is it not extraordinary!" exclaimed Amanda, with a vivacity which showed that her own curiosity was roused, "but it was madame's wish, quite her wish; this morning she sent Monsieur Charles away, and this afternoon as I was in her room, she did not give monsieur any peace until he had promised to go, and, in spite of the storm which is threatening, I saw him ride away as I came out."

Nathalie made no reply; she began to understand why Madame Marceau had sent away her son and her brother, and this made her feel anxious respecting the result of their interview. If she suppressed all resentment of the past, she could not, however, forget that she who now sent for her, had been the cause of

all her woe. Absorbed by these reflections, she silently proceeded up the road leading from the little town to the château. It was a gloomy evening, with a dark threatening sky lowering over the whole of the surrounding landscape. Low thunder muttered in the distance; not a breath of air stirred the leaves or branches of the trees which shaded the road on either side; all nature had that breathless stillness which forebodes the coming of the storm.

Immediately on arriving, Nathalie was ushered into the bed-room of Madame Marceau. It was almost dark; the curtains carefully excluded every lingering ray of daylight; a pale wax-light burned on a low table at the further end of the room. At first all seemed gloom to Nathalie's sight, but as her eye became accustomed to the doubtful light of the apartment, she gradually discerned from behind the sombre damask curtains of the bed, the pale face of Madame Marceau. It was not a week since she had left, yet was she struck with the ghastly change a few days had already made. "She is indeed dying," thought Nathalie, as she hesitatingly came forward.

"Oh! it is you!" feverishly exclaimed Madame Marceau, attempting to raise herself up, but failing in the effort: the nurse had to help her. She

accepted her aid with evident impatience, and without thanks, briefly said, "leave us."

They remained alone. Nathalie had not yet spoken. The sight of Madame Marceau recalled too vividly all that had passed. As she sat there at the foot of the bed, she felt that she gazed on the same pitiless face which had sealed her destiny. To resent the ill worked by one now so near the end of all earthly good or evil seemed cruel; but the wound still bled inwardly, and not to feel it was not in her power.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said the lady, after a brief silence, "may I know your final decision; will you or will you not marry my son?"

"No, madame, I will not," replied Nathalie, in a low and deliberate tone.

"You will not," bitterly echoed Madame Marceau; "and it required ten days to come to this decision!"

Nathalie did not answer. Her conscience told her that her conduct had not been quite justifiable, and she neither sought nor wished to excuse it.

"Well!" sharply exclaimed the lady, "what else have you to say?"

"Nothing else, madame."

"So you think to insult us with impunity; presumptuous girl!"

A frown had gathered over her brow; but Nathalie met her look steadily.

"To decline an affection I never sought is not insult," she very firmly replied.

"Oh! Nathalie, Nathalie!" bitterly exclaimed the lady, "insult would be nothing; it is wrong, actual wrong, that you have worked to me and mine. You have been the wreck of all my hopes for the future; all. I had bent my mind on a rich and brilliant marriage for Charles; he would have agreed, but for his absurd passion for you."

"Since that absurd passion is hopeless, Monsieur Marceau will now enter into your views," coldly said Nathalie.

"Yes," replied the lady, with increased bitterness, "he will; but what woman will be flattered at the prospect of marrying a man you have refused?"

Nathalie coloured, but she suppressed her indignant anger, and merely said:—

"This fear is one you need not have, madame; no one shall know from me that I ever had the opportunity of giving any such refusal."

"But it will be suspected, and discovered ulti-

mately. It will be reported that you spent a whole winter here, that you left when my son came back, and left of your own accord! At first it will only be whispered, then rumoured, and known at length all through Sainville, all over the province: such news travels fast."

"It is my intention to leave both Sainville and Normandy speedily," Nathalie calmly replied; "when I am gone, the matter will soon be forgotten."

"Leave!" joyfully exclaimed Madame Marceau; "but no," she added, with sudden doubt, "you do not mean it sincerely."

"And why not, madame?" gravely asked Nathalie.

"Then leave now, if you are indeed sincere," urged Madame Marceau, with a fixed glance.

"I shall do so when means and a fit opportunity offer," was the calm reply.

"I will give you the means, and afford you the opportunity," eagerly said Madame Marceau.

"You, madame!" exclaimed Nathalie, with much surprise.

"Yes," she replied, in a brief and feverish tone; "I had already thought of this: I foresaw your refusal: I also foresaw that Sainville and Normandy would become disagreeable to you: I settled it all beforehand. The sooner you leave the better, of

course; do not look so astonished! I tell you, you can leave this very evening if you like; that is to say, if you are sincere."

She paused, out of breath at the rapidity with which she had spoken, but her glittering eyes remained fixed on the astonished countenance of the young girl.

"And if I were to leave," said Nathalie, after a pause, "where should I go to?"

"To the south; you are from the south: you must like the south: it is much more beautiful than this cold Normandy of ours. Besides, I have a friend in the south, a lady to whom I have already written about you, who wants a companion, who will love you, and whom you cannot fail to like."

Seeing how far Madame Marceau's plans had extended, Nathalie now thought fit to check this.

"I thank you, madame, for your kindness and foresight," she said, very coldly, "but I cannot agree to this."

Madame Marceau bit her lip.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Because I will never again enter any family as companion."

"Oh! there is no family there; my friend has

neither brother nor son;" said Madame Marceau, now speaking with unrestrained bitterness.

Nathalie coloured deeply, but forbore to reply.

"Well, do you consent or decline?" resumed the sick lady.

"I decline."

Well as she habitually controlled the workings of her features, Madame Marceau could not now conceal the bitter disappointment she experienced.

"Then you were not sincere," she exclaimed, "and you only spoke of leaving, in order to get all this out of me."

"I had no such intention," replied Nathalie, a little indignantly, "and if I spoke of leaving, it is because it is my firm, irrevocable intention to leave."

The last words were uttered with a sorrowful decision, that forbade Madame Marceau to doubt their truth. She seemed to reflect, then said suddenly:—

"I believe you are sincere, and therefore I feel you cannot decline what I am going to propose: namely, to leave Sainville, settle where you like, and receive in exchange for this compliance a yearly settlement from me. Mind, I propose this for my own advantage, not for yours: have no scruples of delicacy, but comply from a sense of honour, of reparation

due for the mischief you have involuntarily caused. If you comply, leave Sainville, and hold no communication with it, reveal your abode to none, or at least bind your sister—she is religious—to a promise of secresy. There is yet hope that this deplorable affair may either remain unknown or at least be speedily forgotten."

She spoke with feverish earnestness; Nathalie heard her with increasing astonishment. After a brief silence, during which the burning look of the sick woman never once left her, she replied:—

"Madame, this cannot be!"

"You refuse? You actually refuse?" indignantly exclaimed the lady.

"Yes, madame, I indeed refuse."

"And why so? pray, why so?

"Because I cannot accept ——"

"Have I not told you it was to oblige me?"

"Madame, I deeply regret it; but it is impossible!"

"You refuse?"

"I am extremely sorry ——"

"Do you or do you not accept?" Her voice rose, her features became more dark and angry.

"I do not," calmly answered Nathalie.

"But you shall not refuse," passionately cried the

lady. "I say you shall not; I say you must go, and no one shall know where you go. I am not rich, but I will settle on you all I have irrevocably, f you will only pledge yourself to go."

Nathalie could not repress a feeling of pity.

"Madame," she gently said, "I cannot, indeed, comply with your request, yet I promise you to leave Sainville speedily, and I conjure you to think of other things in this solemn moment."

"So you think I am dying, do you?" replied Madame Marcea , with a bitter laugh; "and you are kind enough to tell me so! But do you think," she added, with a withering look, "that I cannot guess the secret of your obstinate resistance? I have watched you day by day; watched you when you suspected it least. Foolish girl! did you think to deceive a woman, and that woman a mother? Yes, I know you!" she continued, as Nathalie's sudden pallor showed her that she had struck home, "I know your hopes and ambitious desires; but never, save as my son's wife, shall you become mistress of Sainville."

"And never thus," exclaimed Nathalie, suddenly roused by this taunt; "never thus, madame!"

"You love my brother! deny it if you can, if you dare! you love him!"

A sudden blush overspread Nathalie's face, but rising from her seat, she said with a firm look:

"I feel no shame; I deny nothing."

"Forward girl!" bitterly continued Madame Marceau, "you confess it; you confess that you love a man who might be your father, who cares not, who has never cared for you!"

"Nay, who has loved me; who, in spite of himself, loves me still," exclaimed Nathalie, carried away by an irresistible impulse, and speaking with all the passionate fervour of the heart's ardent faith.

Madame Marceau looked at her like one stupified.

"You say so, you dare to say so," she at length observed; "my brother love you—my brother marry you? Well, I shall ask him."

"Madame, you cannot mean it?" cried Nathalie, with sudden terror.

"I beg your pardon; I do mean it."

"No, you cannot be so cruel, so treacherous," exclaimed Nathalie, with trembling agitation.

"Comply with my request and I am silent," suddenly rejoined the lady.

"Never," replied Nathalie, with much energy, "never;—say, repeat what you will, I care not; I stand strong and secure in the sense of my own purity. I spoke in a moment of folly, but I said the

truth: you know it; he knows it better still. If he judges me ill, God forgive him; my conscience acquits me."

The head of Madame Marceau sank back on her pillow; she was very pale; her lips quivered; her hands trembled. Nathalie, much alarmed, rang the bell; the nurse entered, gave a rapid glance to the patient, then turned to Nathalie.

"What have you been doing to her?" she exclaimed, almost angrily.

"Nothing," replied Nathalie, in a faltering tone.

The woman no longer heeded her: she was seeking to restore Madame Marceau, who had fainted away; in a few minutes she succeeded. Nathalie, guessing her aspect would do the patient little good, had retired to a dark and distant part of the room.

"I feel better now," said Madame Marceau, calmly enough, in reply to an inquiry of the nurse; "but what step is that on the staircase?" she uneasily added. The door opened as she spoke, and Monsieur de Sainville entered.

Nathalie had half-prepared herself for this moment. She had thought that if she met Monsieur de Sainville by the bedside of his dying sister, she could see him with calmness and unconcern, and now she found that it was not so, that what the brain

wills the heart may not always obey, that her cheek deepened in colour, and that her whole frame trembled as though mortality did not exist, and threw not its shadow over the longest and most enduring love.

Without seeing her, he advanced towards his sister. In spite of her weakness Madame Marceau half raised herself up to exclaim :

" Armand, Armand ! is that you ? Why did you come back ?"

" I thought it best with a storm threatening, and you so unwell."

Madame Marceau sank back on her pillow.

" It is a fatality," she muttered, with something like despair ; " do what I will, it still ends thus, and fools say there is no destiny."

" What is the matter, Rosalie ?" kindly asked her brother ; " why does my return trouble you thus ?"

She made no reply ; she was gradually resuming her self-possession, and turning towards the obscure spot of the room where Nathalie still stood, she calmly said :

" Petite, I will not detain you any longer ; there is a storm threatening : your poor sister would feel uneasy. Good bye."

For one moment Monsieur de Sainville lo ok

discomposed, as his glance suddenly fell on Nathalie, who came forward without looking at him, but he soon checked the momentary feeling, and quietly observed:

"The storm has come, Rosalie, and it was lest you should feel uneasy that I came up."

A lightning flash quickly followed by a loud peal of thunder, confirmed the assertion.

Madame Marceau glanced from her brother, who had taken a seat at the foot of her bed, to Nathalie, who stood near her head. Their looks were averted: were their hearts asunder?

"It is a fatality!" she muttered again.

She said no more, she looked pale, faint, and exhausted. Nathalie remained in the same attitude for a few minutes, then left the room. On the landing she met the doctor, who entered the sick room while she opened the door of the *salon*. A small lamp burned on the table; but no one was there; yet a seat and a book showed it had recently been occupied; by Monsieur de Sainville, most probably. Nathalie turned away, troubled at heart, and walked to one of the windows; she drew back the curtain and looked with unquailing glance on the storm, now at the height of its wrath. The sky was of a deadly darkness, ever and anon

traversed by lurid lightning: the avenue, the road, the landscape beyond appeared illumed for a second; then suddenly vanished into deeper gloom, whilst the full thunder seemed to shake the house to its very foundations.

Half an hour had thus elapsed when Amanda came in. She was weeping and sank down in a seat.

"Good God!" cried Nathalie, turning very pale, "what is it?"

"My dear mistress!" exclaimed Amanda.

"Well!" breathlessly cried the young girl.

"Alas! the doctor scarcely hopes she will outlive this dreadful night; I thought I would come and tell mademoiselle, whose deep sensibility I know so well. I must now go and prepare Madame la Chanoinesse, who will soon be my only mistress,—unless, indeed, monsieur or his nephew should marry; the former is much the more likely of the two, for Monsieur Charles is rather young. As to monsieur having taken any resolve or vow, I think, for my part, that those vows were made to be broken, and that though gentlemen may be women-haters, yet when it comes to the point, they generally find there is no decent living without women; and indeed since everything is for the best——"

A peal of thunder interrupted what she was going to add. She trembled and turned pale.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "is not this awful?"

"I do not mind the storm," said Nathalie, "but I remember that Madame de Sainville does; you had better go to her."

Amanda, who thought a ricketty turret much less secure than a drawing-room, inclosed in a mass of solid masonry, very reluctantly complied.

Nathalie once more remained alone. She was deeply agitated. Her old fear of the storm had vanished. A power mightier far than that of lightning or tempest was now beneath that roof; the storm without would pass away and leave a serener sky; the power within would not depart until its task were done, not until the light which now burned so feebly were quenched for ever. The most impressive sermons have been preached on the vanity of this world, and all it contains, but what sermon is so powerful as the thought, presence, or sight of death? All that Rose had ever urged to her in her mournful wisdom recurred to the memory of the young girl. What was love, when life was so brief? Strange as it seemed, and as it must ever seem when the tide of life flows full within us, she too would die. She remembered the words she had heard not so long

ago: "Fresh and fair as you are now, you too must share the fate of earth's most glorious and most lovely things; you too must pass away, and fade, and die." But, alas! even now as then, the sense of the words seemed to fall heavily on her ear, whilst the look, the tone, with which they had been uttered, lived once more within her, and sent their impassioned thrill through her beating heart.

Anxious to banish these thoughts, she looked out once more. The storm had ceased; an occasional flash of pale lightning revealed the dark depths of the sky, and the low muttering thunder was still heard in the distance, like a conquered foe sullenly retiring. Heavy rain had succeeded to the storm; it poured down in torrents with a low rushing sound, that seemed to Nathalie like the distant voice of that dark flood, whose waves must bear us all to the last journey's unknown bourne.

A strange sense of awe came over her. Sorrow she could not feel, but a solemn hush fell on her feelings: she felt that death was in the house. She left the window and sat in the arm-chair, the same where, on many a winter evening, she had indulged in those wild reveries which were not of the imagination alone, but of the far wilder, and more dangerous romance of the heart. Thus she remained for

several hours. At eleven the door opened and the doctor entered; he softly came forward, shook his head, took a seat, folded his hands, sighed, and looked attentively at Nathalie. He was a short, corpulent little man, with a good-humoured and even jocund face, ill adapted to express gravity or sorrow. Nathalie, unable to understand the meaning of his presence, looked at him with surprise and alarm.

"Sir," she said at length.

"Yes," he interrupted; "very sad, very; but not unexpected, which is a great source of consolation. I foretold it ten days ago."

Nathalie looked at him again; he shook his head and closed his eyes. She turned pale, and felt so faint, that she was compelled to cling to the arm of her chair for support. It was all over then: she had expected this, but not so speedily. It seemed most strange that the being with whom she had spoken but a few hours back, should now be nothing—so far as this world was concerned. Was this, then, the result of all the scheming which to the end had filled that worldly heart?

The doctor, perceiving that the young girl looked more shocked than grieved, resumed:—

"There is another great source of consolation:

the unhappy lady remained wholly unconscious of her approaching fate."

"Wholly unconscious!" thought Nathalie, with something like contempt, for, apart from all religious feeling, though she was by no means void of it, she thought it cowardly thus to die.

And yet this is the end which the world considers fortunate! Strange good fortune, which consists in being cheated into death. There must truly be great, nay, awful degradation abroad, when this cowardly death is envied: there must be a singular unconsciousness of the rights of the soul, of the duties of life, of the dignity that pertains to human beings.

"Yes, a great source of consolation," resumed the doctor; "but, as I said, I predicted it; from the night I was called up suddenly, I knew, and told Monsieur de Sainville how it would be."

Nathalie looked up; she remembered Monsieur de Sainville's sadness in the garden at night: this, then, explained it.

"I conclude that so orderly a lady left all her affairs in a proper state," continued the doctor, whom few things annoyed so much as a patient dying with affairs unsettled. "It is certainly a great source of consolation that her brother was here to see that all

was right; and another source of consolation, that her son was away, since his feelings were spared a painful and certainly unnecessary shock."

Oh, sorrow! chastener and purifier of the heart, you too have rights unacknowledged and wrongfully withheld; for do we not escape from you as from a foe we dare not brave, nor even attempt to subdue?

A good deal more the doctor said, but he at length perceived that Nathalie had ceased to heed him. He retired; again she remained alone, until Amanda came to ask if she would not, since it was much too late to think of returning home, take some rest in her own room. When the young girl inquired after the Canoness, she was told that Aunt Radegonde knew nothing as yet, which of course rendered it more advisable that they should not meet for the present.

Nathalie went up to her turret-chamber; how little she had thought on leaving it, ever to sleep there again. She remembered Madame Marceau's exclamation: "it is a fatality," and in the passing superstition of her heart, she asked herself if a mysterious destiny did not indeed draw her back to the abode where real life had first dawned before her.

No light came from the opposite turret; yet through all the awe and solemnity of the hour, the young girl could not forget that she slept, or more properly rested, beneath the same roof with Madame Marceau's brother.

CHAPTER II.

The death of her niece greatly affected the poor Canoness. As she knew nothing of Nathalie's motives or feelings, she greatly wondered and complained when the young girl left her on the following day, and was extremely urgent in beseeching her to return after the funeral. With this request Nathalie would certainly not have complied, but for the fact that both Monsieur de Sainville and his nephew were away for a fortnight; such being the case, she consented.

On the evening of the day appointed for her return to Madame Lavigne's, Rose, after leaving her aunt, and entering her own room, found Nathalie sitting there alone.

"I did not know you were come back," she said.

Nathalie did not reply, but looked up slowly:

something in her whole aspect struck Rose so much, that she suddenly stopped short, in order to look at her more attentively. The young girl seemed to have been preparing to undress, for her unbraided hair fell in thick waves around her; but she had not proceeded further in her task, and she now sat back in her chair, with her hands clasped on her knees; the neglected wick of the tallow candle burning on the table near her, showed that she had long been there. She looked up at her sister with an abstracted gaze.

"Yes, I am come back," she slowly replied, and again relapsed into her reverie.

Rose gave her a wondering look, but busied herself about the room. Nathalie did not move; five minutes elapsed; Rose looked at her sister repeatedly, but without succeeding in meeting her gaze, which was fastened on the floor. Stopping short before her, she at length said, in her low, grave voice: "Child, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Nathalie, and she rose quickly.

But laying her hand on the shoulder of her sister, Rose calmly continued: "You cannot deceive me, what is it?"

She eyed her fixedly, as they stood side by side, in the centre of the narrow room. The eyelids of

Nathalie drooped, but her lips parted,—not with a smile, for it was scarcely so definite,—but with an expression that conveyed so much; that told so plainly the pure joy of a pure and happy heart, that Rose felt confirmed.

"Are you glad, and will you not tell me why?" she asked, with something like reproach.

Nathalie turned quickly towards her, and by an instinctive impulse pressed her lips to the hand that rested on her shoulder, but she did not speak. After waiting for a while, Rose made a motion to withdraw; her sister detained her.

"I am glad, Rose," she said, in a low and hesitating tone, "because I think, indeed I know, that he has not ceased to esteem me."

She looked up to see how Rose would receive this: her sister was looking at her somewhat sadly.

"Poor child!" said she in a pitying tone, "is it because that harsh, proud man has not been quite so harsh, quite so proud, that when I came in, you looked so happy?"

She sighed as she spoke. Nathalie averted her face, but even through the falling hair that partly veiled her cheek, Rose could see that she blushed deeply. She bent down and fixed her calm penetrating glance so that it met the young girl's eyes,

but though Nathalie's look was frank, it could not always be easily fathomed, and now it completely baffled the scrutiny of Rose.

The young girl probably felt this, for, without shrinking from her sister's glance, she smiled a little archly.

"Have you any objection to tell me what has happened since we met?" asked Rose.

"No, Rose, I have not;" yet she spoke hesitatingly.

Her sister seated herself on the edge of the bed, signed her to take a place near her, and assumed a listening attitude.

"It is a long story," said Nathalie.

"Never mind."

"Listen! there is the abbey clock striking ten; it is late."

"Not too late to hear you."

"But your aunt will be angry."

"We can talk low."

She waited; but Nathalie did not speak. Rose perceived it would be necessary to question.

"Did you see Monsieur de Sainville?" she resumed.

"Yes, I saw him; both he and his nephew returned to-day. I believe they had not long been in

the house, and I was preparing to go, when Amanda came to ask me if I would object meeting them in the library. I concluded that Charles Marceau, being ignorant of my definite reply, wished to hear it; but why his uncle should have anything to do with this, vexed and surprised me. Yet not seeming to wish to avoid the interview, I complied. They were both in the library—both in deep mourning, which made them look strange. They rose to receive me. Monsieur de Sainville did not sit down again. Charles obsequiously drew a chair for me. I sat down. I felt very faint and heartsick. My resolve was taken; but explanations are only favourable to the calm and the self-possessed; taught by the past, I feared. There was a pause. Monsieur de Sainville was the first to speak; he addressed me in his coldest and gravest tone, and apologized for his presence.

"'An express request of my sister on the last evening of her life,' said he,—'a request with which I have promised to comply, but into the nature of which it is needless for me to enter, renders it advisable that I should assist at this explanation between you and my nephew, so that no possible doubt of its results shall remain on my mind. I trust you will be kind enough to take my word for this, and to believe that a sense of duty and not my own choice

has induced me to overcome my personal reluctance in this matter.'

"'Allow me to observe, sir,' blandly remarked Charles, 'that your presence is a renewed testimony of your former sanction, and therefore highly welcome. May I hope that Mademoiselle Montolieu participates in the same feeling?'

"If it was his intention to put me out of temper from the very beginning, Charles Marceau certainly succeeded. Irritated at the tone he took, I abruptly requested to be favoured with the knowledge of his precise object in soliciting this interview.

"He seemed slightly embarrassed.

"'I must trust to your candour,' he at length replied, 'not to misconstrue me; but I believe you will agree with me that the recent death of my dear mother renders delay both advisable and becoming.'

"'Delay! What delay?' I exclaimed in alarm.

"'I know,' he resumed, without answering, 'that there are objections to it; but I think it is a mark of respect we both owe to her memory.'

"'Will you be good enough, sir,' I said, trembling from head to foot as I spoke, 'to tell me what you mean?'

"His eyes were bent upon the floor; his whole

mien was embarrassed; looking up at length he replied very gravely:

"'I feel that I am in a most difficult position, since the point I am obliged to urge is one likely to prejudice me in your opinion; and yet allow me to say that I have little fear but that reflection wil convince you aproper regard for the memory of the dead does not imply indifference for the living.'

"He spoke with great composure, and met my look very steadily; a moment I felt myself bewildered and asked myself under what dream I laboured, but I soon recovered.

"'I exact no explanations,' I warmly exclaimed; 'What do you mean by that strange language? Do you or do you not imply that there has been a contract between us, for the fulfilment of which contract you ask delay? Or is this a mere delusion of my senses?'

"'I understand your incredulity,' he said, in a penitent tone, 'but pray do not misinterpret my motives. With regard to the delay, my feelings——'

"'Good heavens!' I interrupted, losing all patience, 'who cares about you or your feelings? The question is, has there or has there not been a contract, bond, promise?—call it what you will?'

"'You doubt my word, my honour, my fulfilment.

of a sacred promise,' he answered, looking at me with grave reproof. 'Nay, you do not know me. Here, in the presence of my respected uncle, I renew that promise. You surely will not be sceptical after this?'

"I saw he would not explain or speak to the point; that I must myself do so. This was no time to hesitate. Commanding my temper as well as I could, I replied:

"'Sir, wilfully or not—that God alone knows—you most certainly misunderstand me. I claim not a promise you never gave; I object not to what you are pleased to call the delay of its fulfilment. An union between us has, indeed, been contemplated; but I have never agreed to it; and I may now add that it shall never take place.'

"'And can resentment carry you thus far!' exclaimed he in a low and gentle tone.

"I am sure I turned pale; this calm, smooth persistency alarmed me.

"'I have no resentment,' I replied; he shook his head with gentle denial; 'but I beg to repeat most distinctly, that there is not and never has been any engagement between us.'

"'If resentment is not, indeed, your motive,' he said, very seriously, 'allow me to say this is a

strange way of breaking a voluntary engagement, and one which I should most certainly have been the last person to press unduly upon you.'

"I felt something like terror; he was growing more and more composed in his falsehood; entering, I suppose, into the spirit of the part which, heaven knows for what purpose, he was acting.

"'But there is no engagement between us!' I indignantly exclaimed.

"'You say it is not resentment?' he calmly pursued, 'what then is it?'

"I remained silent.

"'Difference of fortune and station?' he inquired, with the smile I had learned to read, and which now seemed destined to remind me how little in my heart I had respected that social barrier.

"I did not reply.

"'Or a want of mutual sympathies?' he continued with his smooth irony.

"I rose—for I would bear no more—and turned towards him, burning with powerless anger. 'Sir!' I said, 'I repeat once more, that the engagement to which you allude has never existed. If you choose to persist in asserting this, I must retire: it is not in my power to give you honour and truth.'

"His look kindled, but only for a moment.

"'Before you retire, Mademoiselle Montolieu,' said Monsieur de Sainville, interfering for the first time, 'may I request to know, so that there need be no further doubt or misapprehension, whether you absolutely decline to marry my nephew?'

"Charles Marceau checked the reply I was going to utter, by observing in his smoothest tones; 'Before Mademoiselle Montolieu pronounces this definite answer, concerning the nature of which I do not think, sir, you feel much doubt, allow me to remark, in the spirit of common fairness, that she really has not done herself justice. She can give for breaking her engagement a motive much more valid than the motives I suggested. A motive indeed which justifies her to herself, and above all to me.'

"I had already vaguely suspected that Charles Marceau, like his mother, knew the truth. I felt, I saw it now. Our looks met; his glance was dark, full of vindictive triumph; I neither moved nor spoke, but a sense of sudden faintness came over me. I know not whether he changed his mind, or whether this was but a plan to torment me, but after a pause he continued:

"'Mademoiselle Montolieu's motive is one that would justify every other lady in her case—caprice.'

"I felt in my heart Monsieur de Sainville was not

one whom such mere trifling of words could deceive ; he, however, merely said, turning towards me :

"'May I solicit your reply?'

"Oh! how difficult it had now become to reply; I looked at Charles to see what I had to hope or fear from him ; but never had his features been more perfectly impenetrable to my gaze. There was a security in his calmness that alarmed me. A host of tumultuous thoughts crowded to my mind. I had no faith in the generosity or honour of Charles Marceau. Wounded as he was in his vanity and pride, might he not taunt me with my fatal love even in the presence of his uncle? Would I or rather could I deny it? All this passed within me with the rapidity of thought. I did not answer; I felt hot and flushed; I turned towards the glass door near which I was standing; I looked out on the garden, but saw nothing, my brow was throbbing violently, the room was silent and hushed, they were waiting for my reply. I felt I must speak. I half-turned round; Charles Marceau was standing near me.

"'The room is close,' said he in his soft low voice, 'I fear you feel unwell; you want air.'

He opened the glass door. We now both stood in its deep embrasure; the curtain by accident or design had fallen so as to screen us partly from view;

the room is large; Monsieur de Sainville was standing at the further extremity, he could see us but imperfectly, and words spoken in a low tone would not I knew reach his ear. In a second my resolve was taken. I turned towards Charles Marceau, determined to know the worst.

"'I do not understand you,' said I, briefly.

"'Perhaps not,' he replied, with a cold smile.

"'I do not think that, in your heart, you wish to marry me.'

"He said nothing. I continued: 'I spare you, by taking on myself all the blame.'

"'And by placing me in the enviable position of a rejected suitor; you are too good,' he answered, with much bitterness.

"I began to understand his conduct; but I continued: 'Answer frankly, if you can; do you, or do you not, wish for this marriage?'

"'I do not,' he deliberately replied.

"'Then what do you want?'

"He eyed me fixedly, but with a look that told me nothing.

"'Act as you like,' he at length said.

"'And if I were to consent?'

"'I understand the condescension, but might not, perhaps, value it now so much as formerly.'

"'You mean, it would be your turn to reject?'

"He bowed politely.

"'How will you act, if I persist in declining?'

"He assumed a look of surprise.

"'Really, Mademoiselle,' said he, blandly, 'I protest against this question; it implies a doubt of your entire freedom. If you choose to reject me, I beg, I entreat you will do so.'

"His voice, his tone, were almost frank, but in his eye I read the menace, 'Dare to do it.'

"'I understand,' said I, bitterly.

"'Yes,' he quietly replied, 'I think we understand one another.'

"I knew what he meant, and indignantly motioned him to leave me. He glided away, apparently unmoved. Assuming a calmness I did not feel, I turned round, and once more approached the table near which I had previously been sitting. Monsieur de Sainville stood exactly in the same attitude; his look fixed, his arms folded: he slightly turned towards me as I hesitatingly began:

"'Sir, I think,' but here I paused. Pity me, Rose; I had resolved to declare my rejection of Charles Marceau most unequivocally, but as I came to do it I remembered his implied menace, and my heart failed me. What I felt was no sin, but I shrank with

poignant shame from hearing it revealed; and, good heavens! revealed by his lips. Instead of the refusal I had intended, I faltered out, as a medium course, 'I think, sir, I may leave it to Monsieur Marceau to reply.'

"I could not help looking up. They both stood before me. A gleam of triumph shone over Charles Marceau's dark features; he eyed me from head to foot, and his exulting look seemed to say. 'So, proud girl, you are humbled at length.' I was humbled; and, alas! I felt it far too deeply, not to avoid the look of mingled sorrow and surprise Monsieur de Sainville quickly cast upon me.

"'Mademoiselle,' said Charles, bowing with a courtesy which only added to, but did not for one moment veil, the conscious triumph he did not so much as care to subdue, 'I shall know how to repay the generous confidence you have placed in me. Allow me, therefore, sir,' he added, addressing his uncle, 'to inform you that happy as I should have been to become ——'

"'Stop!' exclaimed his uncle, in a voice which, though low, commanded obedience; 'it is only fair, before you proceed, to ask Mademoiselle Montolieu whether her ambiguous reply meant that she was ready to be accepted or refused, at your will, that

she was willing to be your rejected bride or your wife ?'

"He frowned, and spoke sternly. I seemed to awaken from a dream on the edge of a precipice.

"'No, no!' I cried, with sudden desperation, 'I did not mean that; I meant that Monsieur Marceau knew my firm resolve never to be aught to him; a resolve I would sooner not have repeated, but by which, come what will, I abide.'

"'You abide by it!' he exclaimed, biting his nether lip, and turning pale with repressed anger.

"'I abide by it.' I stood near the table, leaning on it with one hand, trembling from head to foot, but prepared for the worst; not to deny, but to endure. I soon perceived, however, that I knew him not, and that the words I feared would never pass his lips.

"'Be it so,' he coldly said; 'though the manner in which this has been effected is little calculated to please; the result is, to me, highly satisfactory. I suppose we now stand mutually free, mutually released from a bond which ought never to have been contracted, which we should have both detested in our hearts, but which a sense of honour would never have allowed me to break first.'

"'Sir!' I exclaimed, much irritated, 'must I again

repeat that there never has been a bond between us.'

"He smiled——a smile which was of the lips alone, in which the eyes had no part, but he said nothing, as if a sense of delicacy forbad him to contradict me.

"'And I think,' severely said his uncle, 'that this recrimination is most unbecoming.'

"'Recrimination! sir,' echoed Charles, with apparent surprise, 'I protest I never honoured or esteemed Mademoiselle Montolieu so much as I do now, for her frank and open rejection of me; never.'

"He spoke too emphatically not to mean more than he said.

"'Enough,' impatiently said Monsieur de Sainville, who did not seem to relish more than I did the turn the conversation was taking; 'I suppose all this is over now.'

"'Yes, sir, quite over,' replied his nephew, 'and allow me to observe, that though Mademoiselle Montolieu's rejection of me might seem to have been dictated by levity, I do not by any means insinuate that it was. Far from it; I am perfectly satisfied with her conduct, which I understand and appreciate.'

"I was turning away; I stopped short as he concluded, and confronted him with glowing cheek and kindling look.

"'But I do not understand you, sir,' said I, whilst my voice, in spite of all I could do, trembled.

"He looked down and smiled; both look and smile said plainly: Of course, denial is the usual formality.

"'Be it so,' he politely replied, 'I am quite willing to let the matter rest; be it so.'

"Alas! what could I say; burning and angry tears rose to my eyes, but I did not speak. Monsieur de Sainville, who was pacing the room up and down with mingled impatience and abstraction, now turned towards the spot where his nephew stood, and, walking up to him, briefly asked:

"'What do you mean?'

"I thought even then that had I been Charles Marceau, I should not have liked to meet that angry look; but he answered carelessly,

"'Nothing, sir.'

"'I ask you again what you mean?'

"This time he spoke sternly. Charles looked up.

"'Excuse me, sir,' said he, with a haughty smile, 'but willing as I might be to comply, there is much that Mademoiselle Montolieu would object to hear

so indiscreetly mentioned; that confidence which exists between two persons cannot always be extended to a third.'

"I was stung, exasperated, roused to passion. You would have borne it all with angel meekness, Rose, but either I am ill-tempered, or destined to be ever provoked, for I confess that I felt desperately angry.

"'There has been no confidence," I cried, indignantly, and I have nothing to fear from what you may say.'

"He gave me anything but a friendly look, but controlling himself, he replied, with an assumption of gentlemanly candour,

"'You are quite right; you have nothing to fear from me; for be assured that nothing shall induce me to utter a word that might wound or offend you; I shall be silent; ay, silent as the grave.'

"Rose, would it not have provoked a saint? But I said nothing. I felt my utter helplessness; I was only passionate; he was calm and artful. But I was neither alone nor undefended.

"'Since you persist in throwing out insinuations against Mademoiselle Montolieu,' said Monsieur de Sainville, 'I must also persist in requesting to know your meaning?'

"'I throw out no insinuations against her,' coldly answered Charles; 'delicacy and pride forbid me to speak more openly. I challenge her, in justice to me, to declare that I am justified in feeling gratified and relieved at her rejection.'

"'I ask you once more, what you mean?' said Monsieur de Sainville, without giving me time to reply.

"'There are bounds even to your authority, sir,' answered Charles, elated, I suppose, at the advantage I gave him by my silence.

"'Good heavens!' angrily cried his uncle, 'do you not understand that I speak not here as one having authority, as uncle or guardian, but as man to man?'

"'Then, as man to man,' replied his nephew, with equal anger, 'I refuse to answer; and as man to man, I ask what right you have to question me thus? What is it to you if Mademoiselle Montolieu breaks her engagement to me, and if I think her justified in so doing?'

"'There never was, there never has been any engagement between us,' I exclaimed, indignant at his persisting in that untruth.

" He turned round, dark and threatening.

"'You need not disclaim it so indignantly,' he

said with his most evil look, 'for you may as well know this engagement would never have led to a marriage you dreaded and I did not envy.'

"I did not answer; Monsieur de Sainville came to the spot where I stood; he did not look at me, but kept his glance steadily fixed on his nephew.

"'You have asked,' he said, with a seriousness free from anger, 'why I interfere between you and this young girl, and had she, indeed, ever stood to you in the relation of future wife, nothing should now induce me to interfere; but besides her own emphatic assertions, I have the express declaration of your late mother—I know, in short, that she is not and has never been under any engagement to you.'

"'Admitting this for the sake of argument,' coldly said Charles, 'I am at a loss to conceive the reason of this interference.'

"'She has been my guest,' replied Monsieur de Sainville, with unmoved gravity; 'it is my duty to protect her from slights and unsupported accusations.'

"'And this, sir, is your only reason?' coldly said Charles.

"'By no means,' calmly answered his uncle. 'You seem to wish to know more; you are welcome to the knowledge: I intend asking her to become my

wife. This, I suppose, explains sufficiently the interest I take in her fair name.'

"He spoke in his coldest tone. I neither moved nor spoke; I felt like one in a dream; Monsieur de Sainville's face was turned from me, but I confronted Charles Marceau. He had turned deadly pale: anger and shame struggled on his features; never had I seen him so like his mother as he looked then. For awhile he remained confounded, but he at length observed with deep bitterness—

"'It is very strange, sir, that you should wonder at the reluctance I expressed with regard to an union which would not, I imagine, have been very agreeable to you.'

"'I am glad to learn that it was merely reluctance—a perfectly justifiable feeling—you expressed,' very calmly said his uncle.

"'Sir,' answered Charles, turning towards him, and speaking in a low and measured tone, 'you have taken advantage of your superior position, and of the opportunities daily intercourse afforded you, to deprive me of the affections of a woman I loved. Perhaps you now exult in the conviction of having supplanted a younger and less experienced man; perhaps she now rejoices in the belief of being at last rid of an affection sincere whilst it lasted, and

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with which she trifled most heartlessly; but this I can say: if I know aught of your temper and character, she will not find in you the submission she exacted from me; if I know ought of her, you will soon grow weary of gratifying her vanity and caprice: to time, therefore, I can entrust my vengeance and her punishment.'

"'You say I have supplanted you,' replied his uncle, with something like disdain; 'know that the woman who would have had so much as a day's affection for you could never have been but a stranger to me. With regard to your predictions,' he added, after a slight pause, 'you can know nothing of a future which is still a mystery to me.'

"'And about which you feel much doubt,' bitterly observed Charles

"No one replied. Monsieur de Sainville neither moved nor looked towards me. A burning blush overspread my features; the glass door still stood open, I turned towards it and stepped out without looking behind me. I walked on. I believe the sun was setting in the west, and that a golden glow filled the long lime-tree avenue; but I saw not either earth or sky; my head felt light and dizzy; I knew not on what I trod; a rushing sound was in my ears; my veins ran fire; I felt conscious of nothing save

the quickened pulsations of my beating heart. When I stopped at length, I found myself near the recess of the sleeping nymph; that spot against which he had once warned me, and where he had said the shadow of death—I knew what shadow he meant—still lingered. This place was on my path; nothing could be more natural than for me to find myself there, yet a strange pang shot through my heart. Am I growing superstitious? Is the belief in signs and omens superstition? Are there certain moments of excitement when revelations unheeded in our calmer moods are felt acutely? I know not. Yet though I felt thus, I entered as if an instinct I could not control always brought me to this spot. I sat down on the stone bench; the coolness of the falling waters did me good. I stayed there until the sun had set; as I then rose and turned away to go, I stopped short much vexed. Monsieur de Sainville entered. I did not like this; for I felt in my heart that I had not come there to be followed; whether he perceived this, I know not. He addressed me with his usual composure; indeed, rather coldly than otherwise. Having gone up to his aunt's *boudoir*, and learned from her that it was my intention to go this same evening, and at the same time having ascertained that I was not gone, he had concluded I was in the garden, and wishing to speak to me, had come

there for that purpose. There is something particularly chilling in such methodica explanations. I could not well refuse to hear him, but I felt that I stood on the grass-plat before him as cool and indifferent as the nymph in her niche. He looked abstracted for a few moments, then said:

"'I found my aunt disconsolate at the idea of your departure; she is greatly attached to you.'

"'Yes, sir,' I replied, a little surprised, 'I believe, she is.'

"'And I believe,' he continued, 'that you are attached to her.'

"'Oh, yes, of course.'

"'Ay, you have a kind heart, and affections easily won.'

"'Not so easily, sir,' I answered, a little sharply; for in my present mood I took this as a hint, and therefore a sort of insult.

"'Surely,' said he, looking at me with some surprise, 'there is nothing offensive in that?'

"I did not answer.

"'I alluded to it,' he continued, 'because I hope to induce you to remain in Sainville with my aunt.'

"'It is quite impossible,' I quickly replied.

"'Why so?' he urged; 'is it your former objection that still subsists? Know then that Charles

is gone, and will not return in haste.' I had thought as much, yet it shocked me to hear this. I dare say he guessed what I felt, for he quietly added:

"'We did not part in anger. Unless when he allows—rarely, it must be confessed—his temper to overcome his prudence, Charles is a very sensible young man. On learning the substance of the last conversation I had with his poor mother, he became quite resigned to his destiny.'

"I inwardly concluded, and I believe I was not far short of the truth, that Madame Marceau, seeing the failure of all her schemes, had thrown herself on her brother's mercy, and that her son had therefore sufficient motives of resignation. 'Thus you see,' continued Monsieur de Sainville, 'that this objection is quite removed.'

"'I cannot stay, sir,' I said, annoyed at his persistency.

"'But if you leave,' he resumed, 'think how dreary it will be for my poor aunt, when I am away, as I often shall be; think how lonely the garden will become! Who will go to look at the flowers in the greenhouse, or sit in the lime-tree avenue? Why, the staircase itself will miss your step, ever quick and mpatient like yourself.'

"He spoke in a low and kind tone; but I was not disposed to be mollified, so I coldly answered:—

"'Madame de Sainville can find some other companion.'

"'None she would love half so well.—Have I persuaded you?' I shook my head.

"'Pray, what is your objection?' I did not answer.

"'Surely,' he continued, 'it cannot be the presence of one wellnigh old enough to be your father?'

"'And cold enough,' I thought, but I carelessly said:—

"'Oh, dear no!'

"'Besides,' he resumed, 'I shall be so little at home. I have projected a long expedition: first, to Italy, which I have never seen; then along the Mediterranean, which I scarcely know; and thence to Spain, which I want to see again. What do you say to this *itinéraire?*'

"He looked at me, but I was on my guard, and could meet his look very composedly.

"'Charming!' I replied, convinced that he spoke thus for the kind purpose of vexing me, and resolved to show him it was not exactly in his power to do so.

"'Is that all you have to say?' he asked, after a pause.

"'I can add the usual wish: *bon voyage.*'

"'Indeed!' said he, and looked slightly piqued.

"'But you will remain here with my aunt?' he added.

"'No, sir.'

"'No! Why so?'

"'Because I will not.'

"'True woman's reason, and yet I know you like Sainville in your heart.

"'Indeed I do not," I cried, almost angrily.

"He smiled, and resumed his advantage at once.

"'And what has this poor dwelling ever done to you?' he asked.

"I did not reply, but I made a motion to pass by him—he had stood at the entrance of the semicircle all this time. He did not move to let me go, but detained me, and said, in a low and altered tone:—

"'Will you hear me?'"

Nathalie paused in her recital, and her sister could feel her trembling slightly.

"Are you chill?" she asked; "why do you shiver so?"

"Because, Rose, that moment seems to live over again as I speak, and then I trembled from head to foot. He said again: 'Will you hear me?' but I did not reply; I could not speak; my heart was

beating fast; it did not seem with fear, nor was it yet with hope. He asked me again if I would hear him, and again I remained silent.

"'Oh! child, child!' he exclaimed in a tone of reproach, 'you must surely feel that we cannot part thus. Do you already know your power, that you trifle with me so? Is it resentment or caprice? or are you, indeed, unconscious! know you so little what woman ever knows so well?'"

"Well?" inquiringly said Rose, as her sister paused again.

"Oh! Rose, why repeat what one so staid and grave would only deem folly?"

"Did you answer him?" asked Rose, without heeding the objection.

"No, I did not."

"And what did he say?"

A deeper colour overspread the features of the young girl, whose head still rested on her sister's shoulder. She hesitated slightly, and lowered her voice, as she replied:

"He told me that he loved me; not once, or twice, did he say so, but over and over again; ay, many a time. His look, his voice, his very tones, were changed. As the thrilling and impassioned accents rang in my ear, I felt as if the pulses of my heart for

a moment stood still; I knew not whether I breathed or lived; but it seemed as if the outward world had vanished,—as if I stood in some new unknown region, unconscious of all things, save one rapturous thought. We stood in that quiet spot, asunder, though face to face; he spoke, I listened; the moon had made her way to the midway heavens; everything around was touched with a soft pale light; the dark cypresses rose against the deep blue sky, and their low whispering sound blended with the murmur of the falling waters. Surely deep joy resembles sorrow, for as I stood there, a sudden sense of the instability of all earthly things came over me, and in the folly and delirium of my heart, I prayed that this moment might endure for ever."

"Was this all?" asked Rose; "did he say no more?"

"He said much more, Rose, much about the past, and there being no further misunderstanding between us. Oh! how kindly and tenderly he spoke. And when he ceased, he laid his hand upon my head, gently, and yet firmly, as if by the act he were claiming and making me his for ever. I looked up; there was no denial on my lips, none in my heart, and yet I felt subdued by a power to which I blindly yielded, and which I as blindly loved. Oh! Rose,

this was very unlike your rebellious sister. How could I once have believed what is yet most true; that I should live to be charmed by this sense of yielding and dependence?"

"What else did he say?" asked Rose, as Nathalie paused again.

There was a brief silence.

"Never mind what he said, Rose. Ah! me, I fear love's language was never made to be repeated. What has been the mutual and impassioned delight of two hearts, leaves a third cold and unmoved. I dare not tell you all he said, all I heard and listened to with averted look and beating heart. You would surely think me very foolish, nor perchance deem him over wise; yet I will tell you this, Rose, because it is the joy and the delight of my being to hear even my own lips repeat it: he loves me; yes, he loves me. Think of me what you will, I will confess to you, Rose, that as I stood there, whilst he spoke to me thus, I felt with a strange joy I cannot define, that she, for whose sake he had ever shunned this spot—she, whose image had once risen before him, between us, and checked the very words on his lips, —she, the beautiful, the lovely maiden, the passion of his youth, had faded from his memory, and lay forgotten in her grave, whilst I alone was loved and

remembered. Oh! yes, he loves me with passion, honour, truth, and tenderness, all blending in one deep and holy feeling. Did I ever say he was cold? Then believe it not, or rather believe me when I tell you that the coldness of his years may be in his look, and on his brow, but oh! Rose, not in his heart. There the warmth, the sacred fire of youth are living and fervent still. You sigh! Do not chide; do not breathe a word to dispel a dream—if it is indeed a dream—so delightful and so pure. I am young, and in youth life is sweet; I have wondered how it could ever be called sad; I have rejoiced in the consciousness of existence with that light, buoyant feeling and nameless joy which rise in the heart when we are in the first spring and freshness of our years; but I have lived to learn that to love and be loved is a deeper joy, and a happiness more exquisite still. Say that I am foolish, if you will, but do not seek to undeceive me; I would not believe you, Rose, indeed I would not. A boundless and holy faith lives in my heart. I did not feel saddened on bidding him farewell, this evening, even though I knew we should not soon meet again. Had he been going on some distant journey, I should not have felt it, in the fulness of my joy. Time exists no more for me; I feel as if sorrow, separation, and all that the heart

dreads, were powerless now. Rose, I stand on a rock, which all this world's grief and sorrows will assail in vain."

Tears of emotion dimmed her eyes as she spoke. If Rose doubted; if she thought that this fire of passion would die away, like every fire of earth; if she thought that the anchor of faith, on which her sister leaned so securely, would in the end prove a broken reed, she was merciful, and said nothing.

CHAPTER III.

The life and light of a happy heart had now fallen on the gloomy dwelling of Madame Lavigne. Nathalie abandoned herself to happiness, with a childish delight, which Rose sighed to see, but which, in spite of her sighing, charmed her, as all that is natural and genial must ever charm. Even Madame Lavigne acknowledged the secret power of this sudden change, and something like a smile came over her sour features as the young Provençal girl moved about the house with all the former lightness and buoyancy of her temper, singing snatches of those Provençal songs which had found favour in the blind woman's ear, and filling that cheerless abode with all the joy and gaiety of her heart.

"Do you not long to be rid of all this noise?" she suddenly asked, addressing her ungracious hostess

on the afternoon following her return from the château.

"My dear little Nathalie," soothingly observed the blind woman, to whom this noise was a real blessing, "you must never mind what I say when I am a little put out; stay here as long as you like; you know how fond I am of you."

Here the door opened, and Désirée looked in.

"A servant brought these from Madame de Sainville for Mademoiselle Montolieu," she said.

And as she spoke, she extended her hand, which held a small but exquisite bouquet of flowers.

Nathalie threw down her task, and eagerly sprang forward to receive it.

"What! *these?*" sharply asked Madame Lavigne; "do you imagine, Rose, that if I allow your sister to be here, it is to be pestered with foolish messages from those people at the château?"

"It is only flowers, aunt," quietly answered Rose.

"Let me smell them, then," replied her aunt, with evident mistrust.

Nathalie very reluctantly handed the bouquet to her. Madame Lavigne took it, held it a while before her face, then threw it down contemptuously, exclaiming:—

"I hate flowers!"

"You are very ill-natured," angrily cried Nathalie, picking up the bouquet, which had suffered from the fall; "my poor flowers!" she added with evident chagrin.

The blind woman laughed.

"*Eh, bon Dieu!*" she said, with her ill-natured smile, "how fond we have become all at once of that foolish old Canoness! But what on earth tempts her to send you her flowers, now? she never thought of that before."

Rose looked up with a half smile at her sister, whose blushing face was now bending over the flowers, as if to inhale their fragrance.

The Canoness still kept to her room; the flowers were evidently not of garden growth. Rose had often understood from Nathalie that no profane hand was ever allowed to touch Monsieur de Sainville's greenhouse plants; it was not hard for her to guess from whom, though sent in the name of the Canoness, the flowers really came.

To Madame Lavigne's indignation a similar bouquet came every morning for Nathalie.

On the fifth day the flowers were accompanied by a note from the Canoness, expressing her great chagrin at not seeing her young friend, and hoping that as Monsieur de Sainville was out for the day, she might enjoy the pleasure of her company. Nathalie silently handed the note to her sister, with whom she was then sitting alone.

"I suppose you intend to go?" said Rose.

"Yes, I shall go this afternoon," replied Nathalie, without meeting her look.

"Oh! how glad I am you are come, Petite," said

the Canoness, as Nathalie entered her *boudoir* in the early part of the same afternoon.

She did indeed look glad, and Nathalie too was pleased; pleased to see her kind old friend, and to enter that house which she now considered as her future home. She sat down in her old place at the feet of the Canoness, listened with unwearied patience to her lamentations on the dull life she led, consoled her gently when she spoke of her late niece, and finally succeeded in restoring her to something like her former state of mind.

"Ah! Petite," sighed the Canoness, as they sat together after dinner, "if you would only not be so perverse, if you would only remain here with me. Armand is very kind, certainly, but still it is not all Now, about those flowers: he knew I wished to send you some, and took the trouble of gathering them himself every day; then, when he went away this morning, he came up merely to advise me to ask you to come over, because he said it would please and do me so much good; then, as he knows how dull I must feel, he comes and sits with me every evening."

"Does he talk much?" asked Nathalie.

'No, Petite, but he makes me talk; and knowing there is no subject I like half so well, he says, 'Come, aunt, say something about Petite.'"

"About me!" cried Nathalie, with a startled look.

"Yes, Petite, but you need not mind it; it is only done to please me. He scarcely listens, but just smiles now and then at some of your odd sayings. He tries to look interested and amused, but you understand, child, that I have too much penetration to be so easily deceived."

The Canoness drew herself up very consequentially; Nathalie smiled archly. Towards dusk, Aunt Radegond began to feel "meditative." Nathalie encouraged her in the mood. "Her eyes were fatigued with working," she said. "She would not ring for the lamp, but sit and meditate too by the fireside." And so it was; in five minutes the Canoness had dropped into her deepest reflections, whilst Nathalie, sitting on a low couch facing her, listened eagerly for a sound that came not. It came at length: the tramp of the distant horse—the clatter of hoofs in the avenue—the well-known step on the staircase. She hesitated a moment, then sprang from her seat to the window. The rose-coloured curtains closed on her as Monsieur de Sainville entered. The fire burned bright and clear. She could see his face, the rapid look he threw around him, the brief disappointment which clouded his brow as he paused for a moment in the centre of the room. But he came forward, sat on the couch she had left, took up a book lying on the table, and began reading very attentively by the firelight. He had made little or no noise, and his aunt did not waken. His composure piqued

Nathalie; she waited awhile, then softly came forward, and laid her hand on the page he was reading. He never looked up, but quietly said, "Pray, do not; it is an interesting passage."

"Then you saw me, after all!" she exclaimed, in a vexed tone.

He raised his eyes, smiled, and making her sit down on the couch by his side, laid his hand on her head, and looked into her face.

"My poor child," he said "you cannot deceive even in little things. You hid yourself, and left your fan lying here on the couch; the first thing I saw was the firelight shining on its little jet chain."

"And how did you know it was my fan? I never used it but once on the day of the *fête*. I brought it to-night to show Marraine that it was not, as she imagined, lost."

He did not answer her question, but said: "You liked that *fête*, I believe?"

"I never danced with so much pleasure."

"And you like dancing?"

She laughed, in a way that said, "I believe so;" then suddenly became grave, and said "she was not so very fond of dancing, after all. She liked it, of course, but could very well live without it." He smiled.

"Would she give it up if he were to ask her?"

"Yes, she would."

"My poor little thing!" he kindly said, "yo

surely do not think me so selfish? I have not forgotten your wistful face when I found you lying with my aunt beneath the beech-tree, nor yet your joyous look when you danced away so gaily. Be assured, neither *fête*, dance, nor pleasure shall fail you."

In spite of her ready acquiescence with his supposed wish, Nathalie now felt and looked charmed.

"Would he indeed take her to balls, and should there be *fêtes* in Sainville? She did not mean charity *fêtes*, but other *fêtes*? How delightful!"

"So, Petite," he replied, "you really thought that *fête* was given for charity's sake? Oh! how deep you are! how much penetration you have, as my aunt would say?"

He eyed her with an amused glance and smoothed away the hair from her clear brow. At first she looked at him with quiet wonder, but remembering the hints Madame Marceau had formerly dropped, she smiled archly and said, with a significant nod:

"Ah! I remember, it was about the time of the elections."

"Why you are getting quite shrewd! The elections! Yes. So my sister thought too. Poor woman! she fancied my brain filled with political schemes, when the dreams of youth were wakening once more in my heart! She thought me so prudent and so wise! But Madame de Jussac saw deeper; she guessed—and let me see it—that the *fête* Rosalie thought destined to lead me to the Chamber, was

only given after all to procure a day's pleasure to a young and merry little girl."

"For me!" exclaimed Nathalie bewildered, "for me! that *fête* which cost so much—to which so many people came—that *fête* was given for me?"

"Why not, Petite?"

He bent forward to watch her face by the changing firelight, and evidently enjoyed the pleased wonder expressed by her eager look and parted lips.

"And the flowers, the flowers you brought from Arles," she eagerly exclaimed, "did you go into the old house by chance? I do not think so now!"

He met her inquiring look with a smile—a smile that said much. "He loved me even then!" she quickly thought, and he who read her face so easily, replied in a low but audible tone:

"Yes, Petite, even then."

She bowed her head and clasped her hands. "God help me!" she exclaimed, "God help me! some misfortune must be near. I feel too happy!"

"Too happy!" he echoed, with sudden sadness; "Petite, Petite, there is not half enough happiness in this world. That which endures is cold and tame; that which is delightful is, alas! so brief."

He drew her towards him and held her fast, as if she were that happiness, delightful though fleeting, he longed to detain her thus for ever.

But his aunt awoke—he released her.

The Canoness promptly rang the bell, and said

"*she* hated darkness." When the servant who brought the light was gone, Monsieur de Sainville rose and lightly placing his hand on Nathalie's shoulder, said calmly:

"Aunt, you see this young girl?"

"Yes," replied the Canoness, with profound astonishment, "my sight is still good, Armand, I see Petite."

"Ay, Petite," said he, smiling, "that is a pretty name, aunt, you have fixed upon; I have often thought so."

The Canoness, who was still trying to find out why her nephew had asked her if she saw Nathalie, looked puzzled and did not answer.

"Well, then," resumed Monsieur de Sainville, "when you see her you also see my future wife!"

The knitting, which had already suspended its operations, now fairly dropped from Aunt Radegonde's fingers.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed, and then looked from her nephew to Nathalie with utter amazement. "But it is not true, Petite, is it?" she added, after a long pause.

"Is it true?" asked Monsieur de Sainville of Nathalie.

She still sat motionless in the same attitude in the bright light of the ardent fire; but when he spoke she rose slowly and seriously, and held out her hand to him. He clasped it firmly within his

and silently looked down upon her with a smile of mingled pride and affection.

"Yes, aunt," he repeated, "you see my future wife."

"It is impossible, Armand; impossible!" said the Canoness, in a low and agitated tone.

"Impossible, aunt," he asked, looking up, "why so?"

"Because you do not, cannot think of marriage, Armand."

Her voice trembled, but she spoke emphatically.

There was a pause. Nathalie slightly turned pale. Monsieur de Sainville coloured, and scarcely repressed a movement of impatience, but leaving the side of Nathalie, he went up to his aunt, took her hand in his, and said in his mildest tones:

"Forgive me, aunt; I should not have told you this so abruptly; but the past is past for ever. I thought you had understood this long ago, and forgotten what it is only needless pain to remember."

The Canoness did not reply; tears were flowing down her cheeks, and fell down on her clasped hands. She shook her head and murmured:

"Forgotten, Armand; forgotten! The lover forgets his mistress, the wife her husband; but the woman who has had or reared a child never forgets it."

Her nephew allowed her emotion to subside before he said gently:

"Aunt, will you not embrace your niece?"

But Nathalie did not advance to receive the expected kiss, nor did the Canoness look up or offer to give it.

"Niece," she echoed, with deep sadness; "ay, I had a niece once!"

She spoke almost inaudibly; perhaps Monsieur de Sainville did not hear her, for he continued:

"Why do you not look up, aunt? You are surely not afraid of the face of your new relative?"

The Canoness slowly raised her mild blue eyes, and fastened a mournful glance on the bright face and graceful form of the young girl; she detected the proud and admiring look which her nephew cast on his betrothed as he spoke,—a look that said how far from indifferent he was to each charm and grace of her who stood by his side.

"Yes, she is young and pretty," sadly said Aunt Radegonde; "young and pretty, Armand, I grant it; but another was so once."

Monsieur de Sainville looked displeased, turned away, and paced the narrow *boudoir* with an impatient step.

"Aunt," said he, stopping once more near to his aunt's chair, "you mean no unkindness; but surely Mademoiselle Montolieu is entitled to something more from you."

The Canoness started slightly: a struggle between her own secret feelings, and her habitual respect for her nephew's will, was evidently taking place

within her: "Petite knows that I love her dearly," she said at length, "and therefore she knows that I wish her every happiness."

"And you are of course glad that she is to become my wife?" persisted her nephew.

The Canoness stooped to pick up her knitting; if she had heard what Monsieur de Sainville said, she did not reply. Ere long she rose; she wanted something in the next room, she said. It was some time before she returned.

A deep silence succeeded her departure. Nathalie had resumed her seat; Monsieur de Sainville was walking up and down the room; he suddenly stopped short, looked at Nathalie, and said:

"What are you looking at?"

"Nothing," she quickly replied.

"Petite," said he gravely, "how often must I tell you that deceit is not your *forte*. If you did not wish me to see that you were looking at this portrait you should not have kept your eyes fastened upon it, as if a spell forbade you to remove them. What charm do you find in it?"

"It is very beautiful, is it not?" she hesitatingly replied, and turned round to look at him, as she spoke. His face was serious but very calm.

"Yes, extremely beautiful," he replied; "and the original, of whom I see you know something, was one of the loveliest creatures this earth ever knew. A poet once called her a flower; indeed she was one,

but too frail, too weak, not to be swayed by every breeze."

"One of the loveliest creatures this earth ever knew!" echoed Nathalie in her thoughts; "and it is true," she added, inwardly again glancing at the portrait which seemed to be smiling down on her in its eternal and serene loveliness.

Monsieur de Sainville sat down by her side.

"Petite," said he, in a low tone, "you should not look at that portrait only; there is another in this room, less angel-like no doubt, far more human, but, in my belief, far more beautiful. Come, look at my Aunt Adelaide; she is dark, but frankness, truth, and courage are on her brow. There is pride in the curl of her lip, in the arch of her neck, but soul and tenderness in her eyes. She would not say she loved a man, and yet agree to marry another, whilst he was away trusting in her faith. If she loved—however imperfect might be the object of her love—however harsh and exacting he might have shown himself—yet would she remain true, and love him, not as a passionless being, but as a woman; not as if he were a friend or brother, but as a woman loves her lover or her husband. Come, would she not?"

"Yes," slowly replied Nathalie. There was a pause.

"Which do you like best?" she asked abruptly, turning round.

"The last, Petite, the last," he replied, smiling at the question, and yet his voice sounded true.

"Tell me all about it," she said, after a while.

"It is a brief story. Lucile was my aunt's favourite niece, and my cousin. We were brought up together and betrothed. During my absence she agreed to marry a husband of her father's selection. When I came back she repented her weakness and offered to break her engagement—I refused."

"Why so?"

"Why!" he echoed with some surprise, "because no woman whose love is true will break through a sacred engagement. Besides, what man of delicacy cares to wed her who has been the betrothed of another?"

"A delicacy women must not feel of course," thought Nathalie, with some bitterness. But she said nothing, and Monsieur de Sainville was too confident of the privileges of his sex to dream that such a thought might offer itself to the young girl.

"What was she like?" she resumed after a pause.

"Who, my cousin? Why, what tempts you to talk about her?"

"Do you object?" she quickly asked.

"Really no," he composedly replied; "but there is her portrait,—a striking likeness."

"What was she like in feeling, temper, and character?"

"A charming, gentle creature, who never had a will of her own—who yielded to me in everything."

"You liked that of course."

"No, Petite; for she yielded to every one, and divided submission is like divided affection—worthless."

"But she grieved deeply, did she not?" asked Nathalie, whom a painful curiosity still impelled to learn more.

Monsieur de Sainville looked slightly moved.

"Well, perhaps she did; but not to the extent that has been said," he at length replied. "She had always been delicate, and her mother was consumptive; this accounts for her early death. But have we not enough of this, Petite?"

"Only one question more: is it not for her sake you shun the recess of the sleeping nymph?"

"Oh, you daughter of Eve," he said, with a sigh and a wistful look, "Lucile is dead in my heart. It is not her spirit, poor girl, that haunts the spot she once loved, the spot where I have met her so often, but the pale and dreary ghost of a dead affection."

A sudden terror entered the heart of Nathalie. "Shall I too die in your heart? Shall I too die there some day?" she quickly asked, her eyes filling with tears.

"God forbid, my poor child," he replied very earnestly; "I will not think of death in any shape for you."

She looked up joyous at once. A stop was put to the conversation by the entrance of Aunt Radegonde. Monsieur de Sainville was sitting near Nathalie; he had laid his arm on the back of the couch, and was in the act of stooping to speak to her, when his aunt entered. He did not look up or change his attitude, but Nathalie detected the troubled and dreary look with which the Canoness eyed them both as she paused near the door.

Aunt Radegonde resumed her place, her knitting, talked on various subjects, addressed her nephew, then Nathalie, but though she strove to be both cheerful and conversational, she was so evidently ill at ease, that instead of remaining until Nathalie's departure, Monsieur de Sainville, taking pity on his aunt, left the *boudoir* at an early hour. The conversation ceased entirely when he was gone. Nathalie sat near the table, her elbow leaning upon it, and the hand which supported her head also shading her eyes. At length she rose, walked up to the Canoness, sat down on the stool at her feet, placed both her clasped hands on the lap of her old friend, and wistfully looking up into her face, inquired, with great earnestness:—

"Marraine, are you indeed sorry at what Monsieur de Sainville has told you? Are you sorry to be my aunt, indeed?"

Aunt Radegonde looked down at her, laid her two little hands on the young girl's dark hair, and gazing

into her eyes as if she would read her very soul, she answered, with another question :—

"Do you love him?"

Their looks met: the doubt, sadness, and regret of age in one glance; the hope, the fervour, the love of youth in the other.

"With my whole heart, with my whole soul," answered Nathalie, in a low tone, but with an earnestness that deepened her colour on her cheek.

"*Oh! mon Dieu!*" mournfully exclaimed the Canoness; "it is a fatality — a fatality!" she repeated.

"What is a fatality?" asked Nathalie.

"Did I not warn you?" pursued Aunt Radegonde, "did you not know the past? Was not that enough to warn you? Alas, no, for you love him!"

"Why alas?" asked Nathalie, with a smile.

The Canoness did not reply, but looked at her with such deep sadness that the eyes of Nathalie filled with tears.

"I see," she exclaimed, in a low tone, "I see you do not wish me to become your niece."

She made a motion to rise; Aunt Radegonde detained her.

"Petite," she said, "it is because I love you I wish this were not to be; but it is beyond remedy now; the will of God be done."

There was a brief silence.

"I understand," at length observed Nathalie; "you think he does not love me?"

"I do not say that," very gravely replied the Canoness.

"Then what do you think?" impatiently asked the young girl.

"Oh! Petite," was the sorrowful reply, "those who have lived long like me know many sad and bitter things; they know that youth and beauty are brief gifts, and that short is the life of the longest love."

"But his love will last," said Nathalie, in a low tone, "for he is wise, and cares little for youth or beauty."

"You do not believe what you say; no, not a word of it;" almost angrily cried the Canoness.

"And why not?" asked Nathalie, colouring deeply.

"Not care for beauty?" bitterly continued Aunt Radegonde; "why then was she so lovely, and you?—but why need I tell you that which you surely know, and which he too, trust him, knows well!"

"How can you tell?" asked Nathalie.

"How?" exclaimed the Canoness, somewhat nettled, "why by observation, of course! You surely do not think I do not observe, or that all this has surprised me so very much?"

"What have you observed?" inquired the young girl.

"Oh! many, many things; I have seen him looking at you when you could not notice it, and when no doubt he thought I was minding my knitting. I have seen him lay down his paper or his book to follow you about the room with his glance; I have seen him smile at your impatient answers, and look pleased when he saw how he could with a word make your face change and light up at his will. Yes, Petite, I saw it all; often did it remind me of the times when he and Lucile were young together—often; and yet, I confess I never suspected he wished to marry you."

Nathalie's colour came and went repeatedly as she listened to Aunt Radegonde; she knew not whether to be glad or sorrowful; so strangely was the joy which she felt mingled with an acute sense of pain.

"Well," resumed the Canoness, with a sigh, "what is done is done; he loves you, you love him; and all you have to do is to be very careful."

"How so?" asked Nathalie, looking up, with a smile.

"Petite, he is a strange man, exacting and severe,—remember that."

"I am neither submissive nor gentle, and he knows it," said Nathalie, rather haughtily.

"Yield to him, yield to him; it is best," urged the Canoness, anxiously.

But this well-meant advice was very ill-timed.

Nathalie was of those who yield from impulse, and never from motives of expediency.

"I submit to and obey no man," she replied, very decisively.

The Canoness looked at her with evident uneasiness, but forbore to urge the point; her thoughts had reverted to the feelings of surprise created in her by her nephew's announcement.

"Who would have thought he would have cared about you?" she thoughtfully observed; "who above all could have imagined you, so young, so gay, could like him! It is a mystery all—a profound mystery."

The Canoness solemnly shook her head, but Nathalie smiled to herself. It was a mystery, and one which charmed and provoked her. Why did she love him? She scarcely knew. Why did he love her? She knew not at all, and would have given anything to know.

The conversation languished, and soon ceased entirely. Nathalie left early. It was a clear moonlight night, and she declined the escort of a servant. Scarcely, however, had the iron gate closed upon her, when she was overtaken by Monsieur de Sainville.

"Going alone, along this solitary road, at this hour?" he reprovingly said, as he took her arm within his.

"I am not afraid," replied Nathalie.

"No, I dare say not. Fear and timidity are not much in your character."

"And yet Marraine wants me to be afraid of you."

"Why so?"

"She says it is dangerous to vex you."

"Will you be afraid?" he asked, with a keen look.

"No, indeed!"

'Do not, Petite; do not."

"Make yourself easy," she decisively replied.

He smiled at her tone. They walked onin silence. She asked him to leave her, when they had reached the entrance of the town. He acceded to her wish. They stood at an angle of the lonely road. He requested her to turn to the light, so that he might see her.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Because I am going away to-morrow, for a fortnight."

"And my poor face might be forgotten in those two weeks."

But she complied with his request. The moonlight fell full on his features, as well as on hers.

"Where are you going?" she asked, "to Marmont?"

"No, much farther; to Paris."

"To Paris!" she echoed, in a tone of chagrin.

"Yes, indeed; and as I may be detained longer, it is quite needful you see, to look at you well."

He spoke in a light tone, and yet Nathalie thought

she could detect the accent of regret in his voice. Why should he not be sorry, even at this brief separation, when she felt that tears trembled in her eyes? He had taken both her hands in his, and was looking at her fixedly. There was affection, yes, she felt in her heart, true and deep affection, in his gaze; not indeed romantic adoration, but that deeper feeling which unites the cherishing love of the father to the lover's tenderness. She felt that she was for him no divinity to be worshipped, but a being to be loved, protected, and screened from ill. She said to herself this was the love she preferred, but had it been of a most opposite nature, she would have said the same thing still.

"Good night, my child, take care of yourself," said he gently; and with this quiet adieu they parted.

Nathalie walked on a few steps, then stood still.

"Yes, he loves me," she said to herself, as if this were a recent discovery; "he loves me, I feel it; but oh! that I only knew why, and for how long?"

The unavailing and tormenting wish pursued her still. Oh! to look into his heart, but for one second; to read there the source and secret of her power; to know the spell which bound him; the nameless charm which had attracted him first, and would bewitch him for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE weeks passed away, Monsieur de Sainville did not return; but his letters were neither cold nor few; Nathalie felt almost content.

On the close of the last day of the third week, she went to the château. The evening was warm, bright, and still; a golden mellow light pervaded earth and sky. She stopped near the iron gate, to glance admiringly at the landscape beneath. A beggar woman passing by, took advantage of the pause, to come up and tell her a long story of misfortune. Perhaps it was true, and perhaps it was not, but Nathalie believed every word of it, and immediately put her hand into her pocket. There was no money there.

"How sorry I am," she exclaimed, with evident regret.

The woman, taking this as an excuse not to give, repeated her lamentable recital.

"*Mon Dieu!* I would give anything for my purse," sorrowfully exclaimed Nathalie.

A brown silk purse fell with a clinking sound in the dust at her feet. She uttered a faint cry, looked up eagerly, and beheld Monsieur de Sainville, who had ridden up, unheard, bending from his saddle with a smile. She clapped her hands.

"I am so glad," she exclaimed joyously; her eyes danced with pleasure.

"No wonder, you were longing for a purse, and lo! there drops down one at your feet! Let me tell you, purses, and well-filled ones especially, are not always to be had for the wishing."

She laughed, picked up the purse, opened it, emptied the contents of one end of it into the beggar-woman's hand, and tossed it back to its owner. He weighed it in his hand.

"It feels lighter, Petite."

"Yes, purses were made to be emptied."

"My experience says they must be filled first."

"You said a fortnight, and it is three weeks to-day," observed Nathalie, without heeding his remark, or the loud benedictions of the departing beggar-woman.

"You welcome me with a reproach," he said; but he knew in his heart that such reproaches are a welcome. And was there not true joyous welcome in the flushed cheeks and laughing eyes that now looked up into his face?

"Petite," he added, with a smile, "you have stipulated that a certain circumstance shall remain a profound secret to every human being with the exception of my discreet aunt. But if we go in together, and you keep looking up with that smiling, treacherous face, I fear much that the great mystery, and of course not a soul in the château suspects anything of the kind, will be betrayed. Had you not, therefore, better go in first?"

Nathalie drew herself up with an offended air. She did not know what Monsieur de Sainville meant. She was not going to the château at all. She was taking a walk in the country, and begging to be remembered to Madame de Sainville, she bade him good evening, and congratulated him on his safe return.

He saw her depart with a secure smile that piqued her. She pretended to walk on, then suddenly retraced her steps along the high wall that inclosed the garden and grounds of the château, until she came to a side-door, of which Aunt Radegonde had given her a key, which she now put in with a smile at her ruse; but for once the door resisted; it was bolted within. She tried again; the bolt was withdrawn, the door opened, and there stood Monsieur de Sainville smiling at her vexation.

"Well, what about it?" she rather sharply said.

"Nothing," he quietly replied.

She condescended to enter, take his arm, and walk down one of the alleys with him.

He had soon appeased her. This evening time was so pleasant, and he seemed in so genial and happy a mood. He was full of projects for the future. Of pleasant excursions to the south of France; of home pleasures, not less delightful: besides, was he not going to resign the empire of the greenhouse to her, and to build her an aviary?

"All of which will help to empty your purse," said Nathalie, looking delighted, however.

"Wise remark! *Apropos:* do you often dispense charity so freely as this evening? Do you know how much you gave the lady in the ragged cloak?"

"I neither know nor care how much it was; I am sure she needed it. Her husband was killed in Algiers; her eldest son died of fever; her daughter is blind; her three younger children are lying ill at home with the measles; and she herself is lame, as you could see."

"I saw, Petite, that she went off very nimbly; but no matter, I am glad it was my purse suffered, not your little purse, my child."

"Oh, but I have got money in my little purse!" said Nathalie, rather nettled.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! I was very economical at Mademoiselle Dantin's, and I saved three hundred and thirty-five francs."

Monsieur de Sainville looked down at the possessor of three hundred and thirty-five francs with a kind smile, and again said "Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! Do not think however, you will make me fancy you consider it so much; I know you do not. But what need I care? This garden is very pleasant; the grounds are lovely; the château is a rare old place; and poor girl as I am now, they will all be mine some day. I like the thought that everything is to come to me through you: it seems pleasant to be mistress, because you are master."

"And it is kind and frank of you to say so, Petite," said he, stopping short to look at her.

"The most agreeable thought of all," she continued, without heeding this, "is that you will go away so often."

"What?"

"Yes, it will be so pleasant when you return."

She spoke unhesitatingly, for though she was shy enough of a caress, she was not so of speech, as free and open as her heart. He took both her hands, and stood holding them in his, and looking down at her with evident emotion.

"Petite!" said he, "you have, thank heaven, too little experience to know the delightful flattery of such language. You do not know there is nothing so delightful in this world as the happy smiling face that welcomes our return—because—alas—there is nothing so rare. Oh! Petite, my child, my darling, always greet me with that face which looked up into mine this evening."

He stooped and kissed her brow, and that with so

much tenderness of the heart, so little of the lover's passion, that she forgave the caress. She felt very happy; she said so, adding, with a smile:—

"And this will last for ever, will it not?

His face became obscured; he did not answer.

"It will last for ever?" she repeated inquiringly.

"For ever!" he echoed; "what has brought up that unlucky word, Petite?"

But she asked again if it would not last for ever?

"What is there lasts for ever in this world?" he answered, after a pause.

"By for ever, I mean as long as life."

"And, child-like, call our miserable little existence—eternity! Do you remember the day on which you said you did not see why life should not endure for ever?"

"Yes, but that is not the question. Will you love me for ever?"

He silently smoothed away the hair from her brow—a caress familiar to him. She repeated her question to him with an anxious look. He smiled, and asked, "If for ever was not a very long time?"

But she shook her head: "She would have an answer."

"And vows too, he supposed."

"No, she did not care for vows; she only wanted a plain answer to a plain question."

"You shall have your wish," he replied, rather sadly. "But, oh! why do you long for the sad

knowledge of good and evil? Without the apple looks fair and tempting, within it is bitter as ashes."

"What do you call the knowledge of good and evil?" gravely asked Nathalie.

"Everything connected with our perishable nature, and its affections more frail, more perishable still."

She coloured, and said, "She was sure that was a very great mistake. She knew that love or affection was much, yes, much more enduring than life." She spoke decisively, but looked doubtful and anxious. He said nothing.

"Why do you not believe this?" she at length, abruptly asked.

"Because experience has told me another tale. I have not seen that affection more enduring than life."

"What matter, provided it exists; provided we two feel it, for we shall, shall we not?"

"Undoubtedly, Petite; we two shall prove exceptions to the whole human race."

There was raillery in his tone, but sadness in his look. He turned pale.

"How long will you love me?" she asked.

"As long as I can, Petite. May that be for ever!"

"I understand," she said bitterly. "Your love is weak; you know it, and you are too honourable to deceive."

She bowed her head, for tears had gathered in her eyes.

"My dear child," said he, in his gentlest and kindest tones; "why, after making me tell you such bitter truths, are you so unjust? If I tell you I do not know how long my love will last, it is by no means because I think it will be brief, but because I really do not know; such is the condition of humanity. May it last for ever! Many ways of happiness have been discovered by man, but all agree there is none so pleasant as loving and being loved. I pretend not to wisdom above my race; let this happiness but be mine, and I am content; believe me, I shall do all I can to preserve it. Alas! Petite; who knows if it is not your heart that satiety shall first enter? You look incredulous and indignant. Then question me no more; keep your curious restless mind quiet, you little daughter of Eve; it may all be as you say. Besides, do not sages declare that when love takes flight, sober friendship, who has no such airy wings, comes and settles down in his place."

Nathalie smiled disdainfully.

"I scorn such a hope," she said, indignantly; "friendship after love! I would as soon have winter after spring! Besides, how can one have faith in a feeling that rests on the ruin of another feeling?"

"It may not be wise to say so," replied Monsieur de Sainville, "and yet I agree with you there. No;

when love is dead I would have him buried, not resuscitated under so cold a guise."

"But why must love die?" she despondingly asked.

"Because, I suppose, of humanity's imperfections. But, child, why trouble your little head with such things? In all conscience, have you not time enough for doubt and sorrow? Love is the creed of youth, and faith the daily bread of that religion of the heart. Deem your love immortal if you will, you shall not find mine less fervent or true for all his mortality. The freshness of morning is around you still, and you stand on the dawn of your long summer's day. Imagine it endless; and though it may be but a dream, I, who have almost passed the noonday's heat, will not quarrel with the child-like faith. Be happy in your ignorance, my knowledge shall not deprive me of all joy. The thought of evening's setting sun need not mar the gladness of present hours. Is life unavoidably embittered by the thought of death? Is there no happiness but that which is eternal?"

"I wish we had the same faith," sorrowfully said Nathalie, "I wish that our feelings were more in unison; I wish—do not misunderstand me if I say so—that we were not divided by so many years; and the sad knowledge which it seems they give; I wish that I were an older woman, or you a younger man."

She hesitated a little, and looked up to see if he were not offended, but he only smiled :—

"You an older woman and I a younger man! Well, child, you have curious fancies. What a demure little lady of thirty you would make; and yet —see my bad taste—I prefer you thus. I would even, if this were a power given to mortal man, fix you for ever, as I see you at this moment, and enchant you into a vision of that perpetual youth which becomes you so well. I was made to be old and grave, but nature fashioned you in the morning, and verily one cannot look at you without seeing that the freshness of the early hour lingers around you still. Oh! wish not to grow old; time will overtake you but too soon. As for the other wish, of my being a younger man; let me tell you, that if I had seen you in my youth, I should not have loved you."

"You would not?" said Nathalie, much surprised.

"No, indeed I would not."

"And why so?" she asked, a little nettled.

"Because you are not the *beau ideal* of my youth."

"Pray, what was the *beau ideal* of your youth?"

"A very different woman from you, my little Nathalie; for she was fair and gentle as a lily; a sinless being, scarcely treading this earth of ours."

"Would you love this angel lady now?"

"Love a being so cold and so unearthly? No."

Every feature of Nathalie beamed as she heard this decisive reply. But she assumed a grave air.

"It seems," she said, "that I am very faulty."

"You are very human."

"And not ideal?"

"Not in the least. What is an ideal woman? The pale sickly creation of some mad youth, or still more crazy poet: a shilling snow-wreath."

"And what am I?"

"A streak of sunshine to gladden the sight and warm the heart; but no, I will not be poetical; you are simply a being of our perishable earth, with a temper like an April day, but a heart of the most honest and true."

A blush of pleasure stole over Nathalie's cheek, and she turned her head away with a smile, but she soon looked round again.

"You like me thus?" she said.

"Precisely; I love you thus."

"A little?"

"Very much, Petite."

"And you will love me for ever, will you not?"

She had come back again to the old point with the caressing persistency of a child that will not be denied. He looked at her; she tried to seem indifferent, but her heart was in his answer; he felt it, and for that moment also felt as if he could turn believer in her creed of love's eternity.

"Yes, for ever," he answered.

Her face lit up, and she smiled joyously; but checking the feeling, she said, with a wistful look:—

"You only say that to please me."

"Indeed I do not," he replied, bending a fond glance over her flushed face as he felt in his heart how delightful it was to be thus loved; "no, indeed I do not, for I verily believe, my poor child, that could I cease to feel for thee as I do now, my heart, unable to leave off, or shut thee out, would surely find some other better way of loving thee still."

A radiant smile played on Nathalie's parted lips.

"Let the future shift for itself," she said, in a low feverish tone; "I feel here that you must always love me."

She pressed her clasped hands to her beating heart, and bowed her face before his look. An irresistible impulse made him strain her more closely to him, and calling her "his mistress, his wife, his child; all that was delightful, dear, and precious;" vow in impassioned language to love her for ever.

They went in. The sun had set; evening was closing in around them with its soft grey light. Nathalie heeded it not; for in her heart there shone a light more warm, fervent, and bright than earthly day ever gave. She was that whole evening so enchanting and bewitching, that her grave lover for once forgot his prudence and worldly knowledge; he yielded indeed so freely to the spells cast around him, that his aunt, who looked on with silent wonder, warningly whispered to Nathalie as they parted:

"Take care, Petite, it is not natural to see Armand so; take care."

"Be quite easy," said Nathalie, with a delighted glance.

Indeed she looked so joyous on returning home, that Rose could not help asking her what was the matter.

"The matter is, that I am a great deal too happy, Rose, a great deal too happy;" she kissed her sister fervently as she spoke.

But when she next met Monsieur de Sainville, Nathalie was much chagrined to perceive that his momentary weakness had wholly vanished. He was kind and affectionate; but he was once more the serious, self-possessed man of experience, who condescended to be in love with the heedless girl of eighteen. The gravity of his tenderness vexed and disconcerted her: she tried to bring back the mood in which they had parted, and failed. She felt indignant: the result was a little quarrel—their first as lovers. For three days she would not go to the château. On the evening of the third day she sat with her sister in their little room, when Rose, taking up from the table the flowers Nathalie had received that same morning, reproved her for leaving them there to wither.

"I forgot them, Rose," she replied; "besides, what matter? According to his own confession his love is as perishable and will fade as soon as his gifts."

Rose was untying the flowers; a letter hidden amongst them fell down on the floor at her feet.

Nathalie saw it, snatched it up with the quickness of thought, broke the seal, and drew near the light to read. The letter was long. When she had concluded she held it awhile in her hand, then gave it to Rose, saying, without looking at her:

"I have done him wrong; you must read this—his justification."

Rose silently took the letter; it was as follows—

"Nathalie, do not doubt my affection. You torment yourself and give me much pain, very uselessly. Recollect that when I have said 'I love you,' I have said all in three words—pages could express no more.

"'We are so different!' you despondingly said the other evening. But is not love the child of contradictions? Do you imagine I could have loved a woman of years nearer to mine, like me rid of illusions and hope? Indeed, I could not. Our individual experience must necessarily have been similar; our looks, after meeting with sadness and mistrust, would not have sought to meet again. But in you I seek and still find what is lost to me for ever, and what is, therefore, so dear—the faith and freshness of youth.

"From the moment that you entered this house, I felt that a change I could not define had nevertheless taken place in all around me.

"I believe that many cold and severe-looking men like me, are not so averse to the society of

women as they are considered to be. I certainly have not had during the course of an active and unsettled life much leisure to indulge in female society, which is essentially a luxury, as it implies a wonderful loss of time, and as constant attention is needed in order not to yield to its enervating influence; but I have always looked forward with pleasure to the time when I should be with my sister and aunt. The pleasure which men take in the society of women may be selfish, but it is very real. It is soothing after the vexing storms of life to sink down into domestic repose and become the centre of a peaceful home. The anticipation pleased me, especially as I had not run the risk—always a dangerous one—of marriage. But when I returned to France, when I summoned my aunt and sister to Sainville, I found that this destiny was not to be mine. In our first interview I saw that my poor aunt could neither forget nor forgive the past, and I required no second meeting to perceive that the proud and worldly woman who still called me brother, was not, however, the once kind and affectionate sister of my youth. Time had done its work with both—I could not blame them; was I myself unchanged? Did I not see very well that my coldness and severity repelled every one around me? Nevertheless, I felt disappointed; *ennui* soon overtook me; I resolved to travel over Europe. I had projected a long expedition when the indiscretion

and insolence of Charles compelled me to offer you a home in Sainville. I say compelled, because it seemed to me that I could not in honour do less. At first I felt annoyed. 'What on earth shall I do with this girl?' I thought, for I have my idea of responsibilities, and when her son was concerned, I would not trust Madame Marceau. Wishing to explain all and put you on your guard, I resolved to see you alone. I felt also some curiosity to find out what sort of a being you were. Thanks to my wandering life, and to the seclusion in which we keep our unmarried women, I had only obtained very unsatisfactory glimpses of a few childish creatures. It is a great pity it should be thus, for surely there is nothing in this world half so charming as a young girl, when in the first freshness of her years, feelings, and purity, she stands on the threshold of life, innocent and fearless, with the curious glance of an eager and long captive bird, wondering where and how far it shall wing its flight. I could scarcely keep grave during our first interview. You were so very peculiar—so much on the defensive—so quick to detect imaginary slights, and yet so ingenuous and so easily moved by the least kindness. I saw that life was teaching you her hard lesson, but that even this bitter knowledge could not subdue native pride, or impart acquired prudence. True originality is never destroyed; it is, and remains a part of our being. But what struck me most then and after-

wards, was the simplicity and fearlessness of your bearing. You were frank and daring even with me. In vain, in order to try you, I once or twice made myself stern and grave. You seemed to see intuitively through the disguise, and wearied me out by your patience.

"Indeed, Petite, the more I saw you, the more you charmed me. I liked that look which seemed to imply that with a perfect consciousness of youth and beauty, you disclaimed the praise and flattery those adventitious charms so easily win; I liked you to be so frank and daring; I liked your light pleasant voice, and cheerful smile. When I saw you at a distance, lightly running down some garden path, and seeming to enjoy so fully the freshness and verdure around you, I thought it a pity that the old house and garden should ever lose the graceful visions which had unexpectedly dawned upon both. My heart yearned towards you long before I would, even to myself, acknowledge why; but little power has the so-called wisdom of man over that which passes in his heart. When I caught my ear listening for your step, and look abstractedly watching your every movement, I said to myself: 'she is young and pretty, and the sight of youth and beauty is pleasant; but she is such a mere child, that I could never love her seriously.' But the strange mixture of the child's audacity and of the maiden's shyness which then characterized your

bearing towards me, of alternate confidence and shrinking, charmed me more irresistibly every time we met, and I took care it should be often. For now you sought, now you shunned me with all the frankness and *naïveté* of a child. You watched me with a sort of curious glance that amused me; you seemed puzzled to make me out, interested too. I thought it was some girlish fancy, and allowed myself to be pleased with it whilst I forbore to examine too cautiously why it pleased me. 'Not through love,' I said to myself, and yet I still delayed fixing the day for my intended journey. Oh! how grave men, who deem themse s wise, can, in some things, be deceived like mere children.

"Do you remember the week Madame Marceau spent a the château of Jussac? Do you remember that the second day after she left, I said to my aunt 'I am going to Marmont and shall probably stay a fortnight away?' You laid down your work on your lap and looked up suddenly—not at me, but I could see you well—with an expression of so much annoyance and regret, that I could not mistake or misunderstand it. One second only did it last, but I saw it and felt its meaning deeply. Nathalie, was I not a sufficiently kind brother and a reasonably good nephew? I had drawn my aunt and sister from an obscure poverty to restore them to the wealth and station of their birth. Little merit was there in that, but still I had done it. Well then I can assure you

that I might have proposed crossing the Atlantic or talked of a pedestrian excursion to China, without either aunt or sister wearing on their features that simple expression of regret. But you, a stranger, you whom I scarcely noticed, you missed and regretted me. Instead of remaining at Marmont, I returned the next day; I was curious to see how you would look. You were in the garden with my aunt at the end of the lime-tree avenue. You sat on a low stool at the foot of a tree against which you partly leaned. Your work lay neglected on your lap, your hands were clasped upon it; I fancied you looked thoughtful. It was a bright evening; the warm light of the setting sun lit up the whole avenue, but it fell with a deeper glow on the spot were you sat. As I saw you there with the dark tree behind you, with your white robe that fell around you in all the modest grace of woman's garment, with your downcast look and clasped hands, I thought of an old engraving of Raffaelle's 'Vierge au Palmier' I had seen years ago in the course of my northern wanderings. It had caught my fancy by its southern grace, and often, though I never met with it again, did the charming figure rise in clear outlines before me. Little did I suspect that more delightful and living vision would one day greet me in my own home. I came along the avenue; you looked up quickly, almost joyously, I could not tell whether you blushed or not, but for a moment it seemed as if the warm sunlight had

fallen with a deeper and rosier glow upon your features, and lit up your eyes with a brighter radiance. I sat down near my aunt; you did not move away: I spoke, coldly enough I dare say, but all the time there were strange tumultuous feelings in my heart; I felt, I knew that I loved you, and I said to myself that the child who then sat at my feet so quiet and unconscious, should one day be my wife and mistress of all around her. I am not of a temper to fear or hesitate; I knew you as well then as I do now. What about the difference of years! I felt I could, because I would, make you forget it; you were young, impressible, in the first freshness and fervour of your feelings; love is an easy lesson then. I resolved that you should love me in spite of years, coldness, and severity. It is an old saying that no Sainville ever attempted that which he did not achieve. It was not faith in the legend that led me, but a far surer knowledge. None have ever loved in vain but those who knew not how to love.

"You were very charming and provoking; easily irritated but also easily soothed. I watched the progress of an affection of which you were yourself unconscious. I knew even before you told me, that you did not like Charles, and so far as regarded him, I therefore felt no scruples. Nor did I think it wrong to keep you in this state of doubt, far more delightful than certain knowledge. That evening when, as we sat alone in the garden, you took my

hand and raised it to your lips—lips far too pure, my child, for such homage—thanking me so innocently for a friendship and generosity that existed only in your imagination, I had not the heart to undeceive you; to tell you that I already loved you with a selfish and jealous affection; that I wanted you for myself and myself only, and that I wished to keep you here until the day came when I might at length take you unto myself, and gather you unto my heart for ever. And yet I was not without doubts and secret fears. That same evening you fell asleep in the little saloon; my aunt too chose to meditate, as she calls it. I remained and watched you there as you slept, but not, perhaps, with the thoughts you imagine, Petite. You did indeed look very pretty so, with your head pillowed on the cushion, and your clasped hands; but I did not think of that. I only thought that thus seen in the doubtful light of that quiet place, and in all the repose of deepest slumber, you looked barely fifteen. Never had I seen you so childish in aspect. It grieved me. What folly was I on the brink of committing? Was this the boasted wisdom of Armand de Sainville? A passion for a child? I was anxiously bending to read more clearly the lines of the face of her to whom I was trusting the venture of my heart, when Madame de Jussac raised the drapery and smiled in fancied triumph at my folly. She little knew that at that same moment

I was debating the question, 'shall I or shall I not give her up, whilst it is time yet?'

"Give you up! alas, how could I? How could I relinquish her who, though gifted with grace and beauty, had yet no deeper art to win me back from sudden coldness than to step up to me like a little child, and say, 'have I done wrong?' Oh! my child, those artless ways have put me to sore trials. As you then looked up into my face, and as I saw clearly what was still dim and imperfect to you—that you loved me—it was hard to resist the temptation of imprinting on your clear brow a kiss which might have been more fervent, perhaps, than that of a father, and yet, believe me, not less pure.

"Madame de Jussac—thinking to convert me to legitimacy, through you, I suppose—carried you off. I took the opportunity to leave. I wanted to reflect and think—then act. I could not stay long away; and time had weighed so heavily on me whilst we were apart, and I moreover saw you so pale on returning, that I resolved to make no more such trials. A change came over you, then. You wrapped yourself up in your woman's pride; not repelling, but disdaining to seek. I guessed why, and when I perceived the change a word or look could produce, I asked myself what other girl of eighteen would blush, smile, and look more lovely because I was near. Oh! it is a dangerous thing for a man

to meet daily a woman by whom he knows himself loved; dangerous even if she be plain, and perilous indeed when nature has made her lovely.

"There must assuredly be something very pleasant in the memory of that time, since I have thus allowed myself to be led on. Surely I need say no more, and your fears and doubts are allayed? I have shown you how and why I love you; I am of no inconstant temper, but though I have never been the first to change towards those whom I once loved, I know that vows have no power over the heart. They can bind us to duties, not, alas! to feelings. Would you charm me for ever, then be for ever what you are to-day. Mind, I speak not of beauty, but of that soft yet subtle spell which I felt in our first meeting, when you stood before me modest, fearless, and met my look with a frankness so bewitching, and, forgive me for saying it, so rare in woman. Oh! Nathalie, do not break that spell by doubt or mistrust. When we wish to drink of some pure draught, and to behold ourselves as we once have been, we do not seek the troubled stream which has made its way among the haunts of men, but the young, pure, and clear waters hidden in the quiet valley, and which have, as yet, only reflected the serene summer sky. You are to me that pleasant and cooling draught; my soul, long parched with this world's turmoil and fever, turns towards you, and delights in your purity and freshness.

For heaven's sake, do not seek to be too wise, or to taste too early of the bitter cup of experience. Oh! if you can, keep your soul as fresh as the pure bloom on your cheek."

Rose, after having attentively read this letter, folded it up, and silently handed it to her sister.

"Well," said Nathalie, eagerly looking up into her face, "he loves me, does he not?"

"Yes, he loves you."

"Then why look so grave?"

"Because, alas! this grave, wise Monsieur de Sainville loves you so unwisely."

Rose spoke sadly; but a bright triumphant smile lit up the features of Nathalie.

"Unwisely!" she echoed; "let him, Rose. Yes, let him, so sedate and so grave, submit to this folly of the heart? Come, what else do you object to?"

"To his loving you with so much passion, and therefore with so little reason," replied Rose, with unaltered seriousness.

"Passion! what do you know about passion, Rose? And yet you know many things. How can you tell that he loves me thus? What was it in his letter made you think so?"

"Everything. Oh! child, he does not love you as a man should love his wife, as the future companion of his existence, the future mother of his children, but as a man loves his mistress. Do not

look so indignant! I feel quite confident that you will be his legal wife; but will you be his wife in the true and holy sense of that word? He is fond of you; he will be prodigal of gifts to her he loves; it will be his delight to be near her and feel that she is his; to provoke her—she is easily provoked—and soothe her again, an art which he seemingly possesses, and is well conscious of possessing; he will have kind words and kinder caresses. But she will only be his toy, his plaything; the charm of his light hours, not his companion and friend. Not her with whom he would take the great journey of immortality; the being to guide in the path of right; to check from wrong. What does he mean by asking you to remain as you are? Does not the mind grow old? Lie not life's saddest knowledge and most bitter thoughts often hid beneath the clear brow of youth? Must not the truest heart lose its first purity and early freshness long before it may cease to beat? And I who thought that he would love you with a quiet, fatherly affection! But time it seems has not that power over the heart, its passions, feelings, and desires which I fancied. The folly of youth can survive the teaching of experience, and passion be strong, despite all the might and wisdom of years."

"Oh! Rose," exclaimed her sister, "your words delight and torture me. His plaything! that was cruel; yet you are compelled to confess that he loves

me—yes, 'despite all the might and wisdom o years.'"

"Does that please you? Be content, then; for I believe his love to be deeper than he hinted, than you believe, than he himself suspects. I had heard that when men like him gave themselves up to passion, they yielded to it more blindly than in youth; but I hoped that he was not of those. There must indeed be a strange spell on him since he loves your very faults. He is blind now. Oh! Nathalie, give him not reason to waken as from a dream of folly."

Nathalie smiled at her sister with a bright trusting smile, which made her look very lovely, and yet it was not the smile of conscious youth and beauty.

"I have no spell save love," she said, "but that is a good one. Oh, Rose! I will love him so very much, and so very faithfully, that, faulty as I am, he must needs love me for ever. He likes me so; ask me not to change."

"Is he your conscience?" asked Rose, with mournful severity. "Oh! my child, my child; I fear for you. For, after folly, comes injustice. Why does he encourage you in your faults? Inexperience is not a merit; the fault of giving hasty replies ought not to be attractive to a wise man. You are capable of ardent affection, of devotedness, courage, and, if need were, heroism; for you are a brave little creature. For him, no danger would scare, no misery would make you faint-hearted. You can love fer-

vently—let him prize that. You may lose your beauty, your freshness of feeling, your *piquant* vivacity, you will not lose your generous nature and warm heart. Do not persist in your faults and weaknesses to please him; he will be the first to quarrel with them. He will ask you to be gentle, submissive, and quiet. He is stern and severe; he will complain of your rebellious temper—nay, who knows even whether that very liveliness which now so much charms, will not end by wearying him? Well, what is it?" she added, seeing that Nathalie buried her face in her hands, and burst into a flood of passionate tears.

"Oh! Rose, you are pitiless!" exclaimed the young girl, looking up, her whole face flushed and agitated, her eyes glistening, her lips trembling with emotion; "yes, pitiless! else, how could you even hint that he might end by wearying of me? God help me! All who have any affection for me, utter the same doubts, and tell me the same bitter story about love and life. It is all disappointment, folly, and regret. This is very cruel. The faith of youth should not be so pitilessly blighted; experience can do it no greater wrong than thus to depress it. Give me, if you can, the cold wisdom that comes with years; and, if you cannot, oh! let me remain foolish if you will, but hopeful and trusting."

She paced the room up and down with much

emotion, then suddenly stopped short, shook away her tears, and smiled.

"Why, how foolish I am!" she said, laughing at her folly; "how very foolish! You are good, Rose; you mean well; but what do you know about all this? If, from mere words written on a cold page, you already think that he loves me too well, what would you say if you had seen him bending a face, flushed and agitated with emotion, over her whom he calls his own Petite? If you had heard him, in a voice tremulous with ill-repressed feeling, telling her how much, how very much he loved her? Oh! Rose; you could then no more doubt him than I do," she added, after a pause, and speaking in the fervent and thrilling tones of triumphant faith.

She looked so proudly handsome, standing thus in the centre of the ill-lit room, with the light of youth's fervent hope in her eyes, and its radiant smile on her lips, that Rose forgot her wisdom, and exclaimed, admiringly:

"I wish he saw you now."

Nathalie laughed, and shook her head.

"I know what you mean, Rose; but it is not that I trust to, it is not that. Listen," she added, taking her sister's hand, and pressing it to her heart; "I feel here a love which can subdue all his indifference and all his pride. Let him love me as he likes: as friend, companion, mistress, or wife, I care not; but

he shall, he must love on. I tell you I know his love is deep and true; besides," she added, laying her fore-finger on her forehead, and speaking in a lower tone, "I shall try——"

"What?" cried Rose.

"Nothing," replied Nathalie, with a smile.

CHAPTER V.

NATHALIE was meditating experiments—always dangerous things; in her case doubly dangerous. Her first experiment was very mild. She laughingly repeated to Monsieur de Sainville the substance of the remarks made by Rose. He did not seem offended, but was evidently annoyed. He frowned and fidgetted on his seat.

"Your sister means well," said he, "and she is very properly anxious about your happiness; but she is completely in error. Women neither know nor understand the sort of affection a man feels, it is that mistake which often makes them and their husbands so very wretched. They have on that subject the most extraordinary scruples and whims which it is possible to conceive. Be wiser than your sex. Ask not too curiously how and why you are loved. Love is not a theme to be demonstrated.

All that a woman has a right to require of a man is that he should feel a true and honourable affection; but to wish to know according to what exact manner and measure he loves her, is to carry the Evelike spirit of analysis and inquiry rather far."

"But Rose says that my quick temper will vex and weary you," urged Nathalie, with a keen look.

"Oh! does she?" he replied, stroking her hair, with a smile.

He said no more; but Nathalie did not like his smile; it was kind, but perfectly secure. She thought it implied a quiet consciousness of that superior mind and will, which give to the possessor the power of subduing temper, and enforcing obedience; a power she had so often seen exercised by Monsieur de Sainville on all around him. She felt nettled at the security he manifested. "Does he imagine," she thought, "that he can sway me as he likes, and that I shall not so much as have the power of disturbing that unruffled calmness of his?"

She found a dangerous pleasure in the idea of convincing Monsieur de Sainville that such was not the case; that when she was concerned, he was not quite so much master of his feelings as he seemed to imagine. For a while indeed she confined herself to the wish, and matters went on very smoothly; but courtships are proverbially stormy, and though that of Monsieur de Sainville was at first made up of dew and sunshine—morning storms are rare—yet as it progressed and reached its noon, the clouds

which had long been threatening, suddenly broke forth.

Monsieur de Sainville had been romantic in youth, but he was so no longer. He loved Nathalie more than she thought, more than he would have cared to confess, but not, to say the truth, very poetically. He beheld in her no divinity, but a most enchanting mortal; no ideal being, but a delightful girl whose youth, beauty, vivacity, and warm heart were a sufficiently charming reality not to need the illusions of fancy. The affectionate familiarity of his addresses showed exactly the nature of his feelings, and also made Nathalie feel that her sister's definition of his love was on the whole sufficiently correct.

He evidently looked forward with mingled impatience and pleasure to the time when she should be his wife. Everything in Sainville now bore a reference to her presence, taste and habits. He even spoke once or twice of her attire, and pleased himself with the idea "that strings of pearls would look very well in her hair." That he loved her very much; that he was charmed at the prospect of having her ever near him; that he wished to gratify and indulge her as far as his power went; that he felt proud of her grace and beauty, was clear to Nathalie, but this was not all she had hoped for. She had hoped that the affection he felt for her would change Monsieur de Sainville in many things, whereas, with all his kindness and affection to her, he evidently remained unaltered in every other

respect. She felt that though she had entered within the circle in which it was his pleasure to seclude himself, she had not the power of drawing him forth, or of summoning any other by her side; it had opened for her, but it had also closed again. And yet love was said to be all-powerful. Had he passed the age when its spells work? bitter, yet inevitable thought! She once fancied "all would be right if I only knew him well. He is a mystery of which I have just read the first few pages, no more." She often gazed on his calm countenance still striving to read the true meaning of its pale and marble-like repose. Once when he caught her eager look fastened on him, he seized her hands, held them firmly in one of his, threw back his hair, bent forward, and, compelling her to look him full in the face, more closely perhaps than observation strictly needed, he said quietly,

"Look and satisfy yourself once for all; for you have been examining me very curiously of late, Petite."

"Oh, sir," she thought, but she did not say so, "let me know you once for all, and you shall not catch me looking again so readily."

Thinking the opportunity good, however, she began questioning him on various subjects. Amongst other things, she wished to know why he had delayed explanation so long.

"Not through caprice or unbecoming vanity," he replied, "but because at my years a bitter knowledge has replaced the impatience of youth; because I have

learned to know that the hope of happiness is often the truest happiness we can possess; that the purest joy is never so pure as its desire. Do you remember that day when we met in the green-house, and afterwards walked together? When we came to the recess of the sleeping nymph, the words that should have revealed all were on my lips; they remained—muttered. Why so? We stood on that spot where, many years before, I had spoken of love to Lucile; her image pale, lovely, and frail, rose before me. You were young and fair like her; like her would you too prove a weak and faithless woman? For a moment—only a moment, Petite—I gave you up, and ridiculed the weakness which seemed on the verge of deluding me again. Should I, in my manhood's maturer years, be mocked by the phantom of a passion which I had sworn to be only a phantom, even in the fervour of my youth? Compassion for my sick sister, who had set her heart on having Charles heir of my wealth and name, had previously kept me silent, and made me delay—imprudently. At first I thought she saw nothing—but women have a strange tact for detecting those things. I once gave her an opportunity of learning the truth from me; she shrank from it with terror. When she sent for Charles, I resolved to show no mercy, but she forestalled me, by declaring that she wished you to marry her son. I could not in honour seek to supplant my own nephew; besides, I felt quite confident you would refuse him. I knew, moreover, you would not have long to wait; after you had left the library, the

doctor confirmed the belief. I felt much saddened. It was not for the intriguing Madame Marceau that I mourned, but for Rosalie, the sister of my youth. I confess that her perfidy—a perfidy to which you fell victim, my poor, candid child—enabled me to bear her loss with due philosophy; and yet, in her last hours, she either repented or despaired, for she told me all, and made me promise never to abandon her son."

"What do you call all?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"Her various and very useless schemes."

"And nothing else?"

"Why yes, Petite; she added that you had confessed to her a sort of liking for her brother."

Nathalie coloured deeply.

"Then why," she asked, a little indignantly, "that disagreeable interview with her son?"

"Impossible to help it. He declared to me you were actually his betrothed; his plan was to have this understood, and then reject you. For I believe that he ended by hating you very cordially. It was necessary to prove to him that I knew such was not the case, and to defeat at once his kind scheme. You had been very cruelly used, my poor child, and I wished to avenge you."

"On whom?" asked Nathalie, smiling.

"On every one; ah, even on Amanda, if she had presumed to be impertinent. What! did she, indeed?" he added, noticing the expression which came over Nathalie's features.

"Oh, no."

"But your look says yes."

"No; only I remember the evening when she came for the vinaigrette."

"You mean when she came to see what had brought Monsieur de Sainville back to the room where Mademoiselle Montolieu was sitting alone. My poor child, Amanda was not to blame. Do you think Madame Marceau said to her, 'you shall be a spy on my brother, and on this young girl with whom he is in love.' No, verily. She said, 'Amanda, I have left my vinaigrette below.' The thing lay on the table opposite Amanda, but she understood the duties of her plce too well to see it. She went down, looked about, went up again, and declared that both monsieur and mademoiselle had aided her in her useless search. The mistress learned what she wished to know; the attendant told what she had been sent to discover; the thing was over. Of course the vinaigrette was discovered at once, with many exclamations of surprise that it should not have been seen before. What, if for this, and other little services, the mistress chose to make her *femme-de-chambre* a present? Had she not a perfect right to do so?"

His careless tone could not hide the sarcasm lurking beneath it.

"How do you know all this?" asked Nathalie, looking up into his face with sorrowful surprise.

"Very simply; I have not lived so many years

amongst men and women without knowing the ways of deceit, great and small. I also know that there is this much virtue left in humanity: what is done remorselessly is rarely confessed in open speech. But surely you do not feel any resentment for that poor Amanda, who was naturally anxious not to lose a good place. You have, I am sure, forgiven my unhappy sister her treachery, forgive also the helpless agent."

"Very well," abstractedly said Nathalie, who was no longer thinking about Amanda; "are you forgiving?" she suddenly added.

"Not remarkably so," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with a peculiar smile.

"And yet you seem to take every little treachery so much as a matter of course."

"Habit," he laconically answered.

"Then you are not forgiving?"

"Neither forgiving nor forgetful, Petite."

"Then you are vindictive?"

"Not precisely; since, if I never have yet to my knowledge forgotten an insult, I cannot say, however, that I have revenged a wrong."

"Because you are so generous," said she, brightening.

He shook his head in token of denial, but she persisted, "It must be generosity."

"And why not disdain, Petite?" he asked quietly.

Her countenance fell.

"My poor child," he gently resumed, "you think

in your candour, that people still love and hate in this world. Well, they do, but how rarely. Hatred! there is not energy enough left for it in our civilized society. You, with your warm southern blood, might experience the feeling, but the mass know nothing of it; they give themselves up to petty spites, and contemptible animosities. Moralists talk of passions; there are no passions now save the meaner ones; the others perished ages back. But we will not speak of all this."

Nathalie gave him a mournful look. Was this his creed? And yet he did not look sad. No passions! then there were deep feelings!

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she involuntarily exclaimed, "what is life?"

Some of the sceptics who hold Monsieur de Sainville's creed say "a jest;" but he took a nobler and more courageous view, and gravely answered: "A duty."

Hard, however, is that lesson when it first falls in all its reality upon the ear of ardent youth. If not long before, Nathalie had been called upon to give the definition she now asked of her lover, she would, in the fervour of her love and of her hopeful nature, have replied: "A delight."

Ay, a delight; for enchanting and delicious are the promises of passion, and Eden itself never seemed more fair to newly-awakened Eve than the lovely scenes and glimpses life had opened to the enraptured gaze of Nathalie. The trance is generally

brief; the next phase is the despairing doubt, succeeded by disgust of all things, or the calm resignation which teaches to endure patiently; but this was a bitter lesson the young girl had never expected to learn from her lover, and which Monsieur de Sainville had been far from wishing to teach. His evident scepticism depressed her greatly.

"I was not always thus," he resumed, "I, too, have had the faith and divine dreams of youth. We all of us, more or less, enter active life in the spirit of knight-errantry; to struggle, subdue, and win. Oh! the glorious hopes that usher us in; the dreams, the visions that enchant this first journey, the sylvan shades, the summer bowers, the adventurous wilds, and caverns deep—these too, have their charm of danger—that lie before us! But, alas! the dreary time when we see the path we must tread as it really is; a barren waste. Then, indeed, for dangers to brave, and a struggle to win!"

"And this is life!" said Nathalie, with deep sadness.

"The life of many; not of all; your's, Petite, shall know nothing of all this. The sun shall gladden, and the shade shelter you still; yes, when you wish."

He spoke affectionately, and Nathalie understood the implied promise of happiness. But she could not chase away the thought:

"Oh! why is he so sceptical? why have I no power over him for good?"

He had left her, and she was sitting at the feet of Aunt Radegonde, as she again felt this ever-renewing desire.

"Do you know, child, a thing I have observed of late?" said the Canoness, with the suddenness familiar to persons of slow perception when they happen to be struck with something.

"No," abstractedly said Nathalie, "what is it?"

"Why, Armand is so much changed."

"How so?" asked Nathalie, looking up, with immediate interest.

"I can scarcely tell, and yet he seems changed, since the death of our poor Rosalie. He does not seem so cold and so severe as he was; there is about him something more gentle, and more kind. He was very much attached to Rosalie. It is her death that has affected him thus."

"But are you sure, quite sure of it?" asked Nathalie, in a low tone.

"My dear child, you are very simple. Does my penetration ever deceive me? Well, what is it?" she asked, as Nathalie rose, and twining her arms around her neck, kissed her repeatedly; "you are a dear child, no doubt, but why do you kiss me?"

"Because you have made me so happy," replied Nathalie, who felt enchanted.

But the very next day destroyed the hopeful dreams in which she had already been indulging. She found Aunt Radegonde in a very discontented mood.

"It was the old story again," she said, pettishly. "Armand, after being so good and indulgent, that he forgave, without even a word, the foolish gardener who had allowed his finest and most expensive plants to die away, was now dismissing Jean, a poor lad of eighteen, no one so much as knew why."

"Is Monsieur de Sainville quite determined?" asked Nathalie.

"Of course he is, Petite; I tell you he is in one of those moods, when neither heaven nor earth could move him. I saw it in his face; and you know if I am ever deceived in those matters. It is the story of André over again, only that this time there is no mistake, and that Jean must go."

Nathalie looked thoughtful, and slightly excited. She was meditating an experiment destined to test her power, or rather her influence, over Monsieur de Sainville. She soon found a pretence to leave Aunt Radegonde in the garden, where they were then both sitting, and lightly ran up the lime-tree avenue, leading to the library. She met Monsieur de Sainville in the act of coming out.

"Where were you running so fast?" he asked, stopping her.

"To look for you," she quickly replied.

"Indeed," he answered, looking pleased, and drawing her arm within his.

"Yes, I want to ask you for something."

"Ah! otherwise you would not come running for me. Pray, what is it?"

"A favour."

"Wonderful! A favour? Can your pride actually stoop thus far?"

"Yes, if you will grant it."

"It must be something very unreasonable, or utterly impossible, if I refuse."

She stopped short, and looked up at him fixedly. There was nothing like refusal in the pleased and yet surprised expression of his face. She smiled, and said, after a pause:

"Forgive poor Jean."

The brow of Monsieur de Sainville became suddenly overcast.

"That," said he, gravely, "is unfortunately impossible."

"Impossible!" she exclaimed.

"Would I refuse you, otherwise?"

"Then you refuse me?"

"I must."

She coloured, and made a movement to leave her position by his side, but restraining herself, she said:

"He is a civil lad."

He did not reply.

"And his mother is a very poor widow."

"And you have been very kind to her," he said. "I know where her cottage stands; I know that you have gone in there, often; never empty-handed, and yet you are not rich, Petite."

"Those who are rich, do not always give most," she replied, with some asperity.

"Is that a hint to me? Well, if I have been remiss, you shall be my almoner; people will apply more readily to you, than to me, for nature has bestowed on you the face of one to whom it is a joy to give."

"And to ask," replied Nathalie, with significance, that showed she was not to be diverted from her object.

"Ask me for anything else," he said, soothingly; "ask me to give anything you like to Jean's mother."

He spoke in a tone so earnest, that it struck her.

"Why do you dismiss him?" she asked.

"He has failed in his duty."

"Disobeyed, I suppose; for that I believe is what you never forgive."

"No, it was not disobedience."

"Well then, what did he do?"

"Take my word for it, that lad has deserved to lose his place."

"Forgive him, for my sake!"

She spoke in her softest and most winning tone; and looked up into his face with a beseeching glance. He seemed embarrassed, but replied:—

"I assure you it grieves me to refuse you this."

"Then you will not forgive him?"

"I cannot."

"And you will not say why you dismiss him?"

He remained silent.

Nathalie drew away from him with flushed cheeks and kindling glance.

"You are a tyrant!" she exclaimed.

He turned very pale; with him the sign of deepest anger. But she heeded it not, she heeded not the darkening frown and compressed lips; she was thoroughly angered and reckless, and entered the house in her most indignant mood, resolved to leave it that very instant. In the hall she met Jean, the dismissed servant; acting on the impulse of the moment, as usual, she emptied her purse—it was not a very heavy one—into his hand, and said, in a quick, excited tone, "This is for your mother, Jean; I am very sorry you are going."

He looked very much disconcerted.

"Mademoiselle is truly good," he said, hesitatingly, "and I am sure she has always been so kind to my mother, that I feel—but I can assure mademoiselle, monsieur was quite mistaken when he thought the remark he overheard me making to André was intended as disrespectful to her."

"A remark about me!" exclaimed Nathalie, much surprised.

"I thought mademoiselle knew," answered Jean, looking much more disconcerted than before.

"I am sorry to have been the cause of your dismissal," she quietly answered, and slowly returned to the garden.

This then explained why Monsieur de Sainville had refused her request as well as an explanation, which could not but hurt her feelings; and she had

called him a tyrant! She felt she could not be happy until she had asked him to forgive her.

She found him walking with his aunt in the garden. He looked grave, almost stern, and took no notice of her approach. Nathalie detected the anxious glance which the Canoness cast on them both. "What shall I say to him?" she thought.

Aunt Radegonde lingered behind, and signed Nathalie to come to her.

"Petite," she whispered anxiously, "what has happened? I have not seen him looking so—no, not for years."

But Nathalie had seen him thus before. Yes, on the day when Madame Marceau repeated to him that doubt on his honour, which she had uttered in a moment of despair, he looked thus.

She gave the Canoness no reply; there was a fear at her heart which she would not confess, even to herself, and yet her look anxiously followed Monsieur de Sainville, who walked on before them, without once looking round.

"Go and speak to him," whispered the Canoness.

"And say, like a naughty child:—I shall do it no more," disdainfully replied Nathalie. "No, Marraine, I cannot do that."

"Do something, Petite. I am sure you were in the wrong, by your look. Go and walk by him."

"And wait until his lordship chooses to look down on his handmaiden! No."

"Then go and take his arm. You are so reserved

with him usually, that he must be desperately angry indeed if he does not consider this a great favour."

Nathalie could not repress a smile, but this, being the most daring counsel, pleased her best; she accordingly walked on and very deliberately took the arm of Monsieur de Sainville. His anger was probably of the deepest dye, for though he submitted to this advance, suggested by the feminine diplomacy of his aunt, who anxiously watched the result, he neither turned nor looked towards Nathalie. Offended in her turn, she made a motion to withdraw, but he quickly detained her. She gave him a furtive glance; he looked as morose as ever, but she smiled to herself and thought, "You may look as cross as you like; but you are not so very angry after all."

"I have been very hasty," she said, very demurely, "will you forgive me?"

She looked up; not one of his stern features had relaxed, nor did he seem in the least mollified by her concession.

"For what are you apologizing?" he coldly asked.

"For my inconsiderate language," replied Nathalie, somewhat surprised at his continued gravity. He did not answer; she resumed: "I am aware that I was wholly in the wrong. I know your motive for dismissing Jean and refusing to forgive him, as well as if you were to tell me."

The countenance of Monsieur de Sainville darkened considerably.

"I understand," said he, frigidly, "you apologize

because it is proved to you that you were in the wrong."

"And if it were not proved to me that I was in the wrong, how could I apologize?" asked Nathalie, who was getting impatient.

"You could if you only entertained for me a feeling you evidently do not entertain: confidence in my justice and honour."

He spoke with so much severity, and had evidently been so deeply hurt by her conduct, that Nathalie could not restrain her tears. He seemed touched by her emotion, and immediately said in a gentler tone:

"Do not think me offended at a few hasty words, however harsh, uttered in a moment of passion. You, have a quick temper, I can forgive that; I will bear anything from you save mistrust; that I seldom suffer from any one, and never where I love as I love you, with all the strength and energy of my nature."

He spoke vehemently, as if carried away by the impulse of the moment, and with a force of passion that made the heart of Nathalie beat rapturously. She forgot her mistrust and his anger; she only saw and felt that he loved her as she longed to be loved. "Oh!" she thought inwardly, "I did well to provoke him since it has led to this."

Aunt Radegonde now came up; she looked at them both anxiously; the traces of tears still lingered on Nathalie's cheek.

"Armand," uneasily said the Canoness, "she is a child, a mere child, do not forget it."

Without answering her, Monsieur de Sainville looked at Nathalie and smiled.

"I must surely be a domestic tyrant," he said, in a low key, "else would my good aunt recommend you to my tender mercies in this flattering tone?"

"No, you are no tyrant," quickly replied Nathalie; "I shall never forgive myself that odious word."

"Forgive yourself, but do not mistrust me again."

"Never!" she exclaimed, placing her hand in his, and feeling, as she did so, that she had never loved him so truly and so fervently as at that moment. It seemed as if her old love had all at once returned; not the troubled, exacting feeling which had of late filled her heart, but the mingled affection and reverence with which she had formerly regarded him and which had made her say to her sister: "I could pass thus through life, sitting at his feet and listening to his teaching."

The Canoness in her well-meant zeal contributed to destroy this good impression.

"Oh, Petite!" she exclaimed, as soon as they were alone, "how glad I am it is all over, and how anxious I felt! Not for years had I seen him look so. I know his face better than you do. What can you have done to vex him? Never do it again; no, for heaven's sake, do not!"

Nathalie smiled without answering.

Aunt Radegonde resumed, "I remember well, it was just so he looked on the day when he broke with Lucile. Oh! he is a harsh man. Do not provoke

him. My poor child had always more fear than love for him in her heart."

"But I have not!" exclaimed Nathalie, with something like pride, "I love and do not fear."

"Be not too confident, you foolish child," almost angrily said the Canoness; "and if, as I believe, you do love him, why then do not provoke and lose him for ever."

Nathalie smiled without answering. Her look said: "You warn and threaten me in vain. He loves me, I know it; he shall bear with me, ay, and his judgment shall yield to my caprice many a time."

It was plain Aunt Radegonde understood, for she shook her head, and gave the young girl a look of sorrowful reproach as she merely said: "Petite!"

CHAPTER VI.

NATHALIE had discovered that she possessed the power of vexing Monsieur de Sainville, and she made good use of the discovery. It was by no means vanity that led her to act thus; but a sort of tormenting and experimental curiosity which was, indeed, her Eve-like and besetting sin. She felt, moreover, in indulging her caprices, the dangerous pleasure youth finds in a peril braved and overcome—the pleasure which, when she wandered as a child on the outskirts of the Pyrenees, had made her follow a narrow ledge of rock by a precipice, in preference to the smooth and open road, even though her heart beat all the time with secret fear. In the same spirit, she now wandered amongst the rocky recesses and dangerous parts of her lover's temper, proceeding to the very verge of his displeasure, then, as if frightened at her own daring, suddenly retreating,

soon to return again, lured on by an irresistible temptation.

Monsieur de Sainville had too much penetration not to see through her design; but as Nathalie forbore from manifesting those doubts of his honour which he resented so keenly, he was only amused by her hasty and pettish ways; he felt like the possessor of a beautiful wild bird, who philosophically endures the creature's wilfulness for the sake of its bright plumage and delightful song—nay, who will even indulge it in its farthest flight, knowing well the charm to lure it back and subdue at once all its wildness and pride.

Indeed, this variable temper, which would have alarmed another man, only rendered Nathalie more seductive to Monsieur de Sainville. He had from the first been charmed by the truth and vivacity with which she yielded to every impulse and impression of the moment; and the charm was on him still, for it is one over which time and habit have little power. Once or twice, indeed, he asked himself how this changeful April humour of mingled storm and sunshine, so delightful for the pleasure-day of courtship, would answer for the long sober journey of marriage; but the doubt never lasted beyond a moment; he knew that his betrothed loved him with her whole heart, and he knew also that his will was one not easily resisted. "When the moment comes," he thought, "I can subdue her temper, which will be only right; but to break it, and with

it all her light, innocent vivacity, would be odious." This comfortable reflection enabled Monsieur de Sainville to bear with great equanimity and good humour the trials to which Nathalie put his patience; and here, accordingly, is the place to mention a contradiction in the character of the young girl which it might have puzzled any metaphysician to account for: she would have been in despair had she succeeded in offending Monsieur de Sainville, but she felt sadly vexed to have failed; the more so as an odd and significant smile in which he indulged now and then, disconcerted her greatly. She was on the verge of submitting quietly and giving up the point, when the opportunity she had sought for in vain offered itself unexpectedly.

The recent death of his sister had prevented Monsieur de Sainville from pressing Nathalie on the subject of their marriage, but when a sufficient time had elapsed to justify a quiet ceremony, he gravely asked her to fix a day. She coolly replied there was no hurry; he urged the point—she still said there was no hurry; he remonstrated—she remained unmoved; he insisted—she refused. Monsieur de Sainville was not accustomed to contradiction; he felt much surprised, annoyed, and offended at the persistent refusals of Nathalie. As she would not explain herself, he attributed her conduct to coquetry and caprice. Unused to obstacles he could not surmount, he now felt it strange and provoking that the whim of a girl,—even though she was the being he

most loved—should stand between him and his will. Nay, the fact of her being his future wife, rather increased than lessened her offence.

Rose felt equally annoyed at her sister's obstinacy, and repeatedly urged her to lay by her objections and scruples.

"Your present position is awkward and unbecoming," she said, very seriously.

"I do not care about that," was the impatient answer; "I only wish I could delay this marriage for ever."

"Why so?" very gravely asked her sister.

"Because, since it seems agreed by every one that love is only a sort of dream, a fever, heaven knows what, I would, if I could, prolong its brief existence, and awaken as late as possible, Rose."

Rose vainly endeavoured to remove this feeling; her sister reminded her of all she had formerly said about the brevity and delusions of passion.

"Well, then," replied Rose, with sudden decision, "do better still, since you are convinced his love will not last: that it is only passion and caprice have drawn him towards you, give him up; have the courage to relinquish him at once!"

Nathalie turned pale.

"Oh! Rose," she said bitterly, "you are, indeed, pitiless; do you not see I cannot do that; that I love him; that come what will, my being has now become linked with his."

"Then marry him now and relieve him—relieve yourself from a painful position."

"A little longer, Rose; a little longer."

"Oh! child, if you care for his love, be wise, and seek to keep it by some other method than coquetry or caprice."

"Alas! it is not coquetry or caprice," sorrowfully replied Nathalie, "it is fear, a fear that makes me very unhappy. Oh! why is he so sceptical? Why did he let me see it? Why did he not deceive me? Happy are the deceived women; happy if they only knew it! It is true I questioned him, for there is a ceaseless tormenting sort of desire in our hearts to know that which is to make us wretched, and I dare say I questioned him closely. I wanted to know, but then I did not imagine?—how could I—that the truth was so very bitter. There is a pitiless frankness and honesty about him; he will tell the truth, however harsh and cruel it may be; if you do not wish to know it, do not ask; if you ask, do not expect he will deceive you. I believe he is truly attached to me; I cannot but believe it, and yet he will not take the engagement of loving me for ever as he does now. He will always have a true affection for me, he says; but that is not what I ask, and he declares that the feeling I mean is independent of the will. I know that my refusal to fix the time of our marriage has offended him deeply, and yet I can —not help it. When he is cold and distant now, I

can say to myself: 'it is anger;' but when he is cold after I have become his wife, I shall say, 'it is indifference.' Better, ten times better, his anger than his indifference, Rose."

Thus Nathalie reasoned, and accordingly persisted in her conduct; but in the meanwhile a very painful feeling of estrangement had arisen between her and Monsieur de Sainville; they met coldly and very rarely alone, for they no longer took advantage of the opportunities which the good-natured Canoness had willingly afforded them; neither, indeed, felt happy, yet neither would take the first step that might lead to a reconciliation, which, from there being no open breach, had become very difficult. The arguments of Rose at length induced Nathalie to promise her sister that whenever Monsieur de Sainville might mention the subject of their marriage again, she would consent without objection; but he unfortunately could not know this, and as his pride still suffered from the repulses he had sustained, he maintained on that point a proud and haughty silence. Nathalie felt deeply offended, she construed his reserve into an open and direct insult, and bitterly declared it was meant to mortify her and give her a lesson. In order to show how much she resented this supposed intention, she chose for visiting Aunt Radegonde the days and hours when she knew Monsieur de Sainville to be away or engaged; left at the time of his return, and avoided him so studiously that they were once ten days without meeting. Such

had been the case, and Monsieur de Sainville was away as usual, when she called on Aunt Radegonde one afternoon. She found her sitting alone at the end of the lime-tree avenue, looking sad and thoughtful.

"I begin to think," said the Canoness, very drearily, "that this marriage will never take place, and that you will never come back here, Petite; matters are not going on well between you and Armand; no, not at all well. Do you know I begin to think it was a mistake all along, and that you now begin to find out you never liked him as much as you thought."

"Oh! no," sorrowfully said Nathalie; "no, Marraine, the mistake is not there; it is he cares less and less for me every day; I, alas! like him but too well, ay, and more than ever."

She buried her face in her hands, and wept bitterly.

"My child, my poor child!" exclaimed the Canoness, much distressed, "do not cry so, I am sure it is only a mistake."

"And why should there be a mistake at all?" said the voice of Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie looked up with sudden terror, and turned very pale, as she beheld him standing before her. He looked grave, and had evidently overheard her She did not reply.

"Why should there be a mistake at all?" he repeated, sitting down by her side.

She did not answer or look towards him; a burning blush was gradually settling over her features.

She felt mortified, vexed, and yet happy, for she knew that the cloud was at length broken.

"Yes," eagerly said the Canoness, "why should there be a mistake at all? Why not have that which would remove all such mistakes—a wedding, for instance," she shrewdly added, after a pause; "it would be a good remedy, Petite."

Nathalie did not reply.

"Petite rejects the remedy," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville.

"Indeed she does not," quickly rejoined his aunt. "It is very strange in you, Armand, to say that. I am sure Petite is too sensible not to feel, not to know—in short, Petite will leave the matter for me as the head of the family to settle, will she not?" she added, in her most coaxing tones.

Nathalie remained silent; her pride was undergoing a severe trial. If Monsieur de Sainville had not overheard her, she would not have felt it, but she had said she liked him better than ever, and now, whichever way she acted, she felt condemned to appear weak or capricious. He was looking at her calmly and attentively. His aunt was going to repeat her question: he prevented her.

"No aunt, this privilege belongs to me."

"But, Armand," she said, a little stiffly, "I think that as head of the house——"

"Be kind enough to wave your right for once," he replied, very seriously.

"Well, for once I do not mind; but you understand

Armand, that when the head of the house happens to be a woman, those matters are generally left to her."

"Yes aunt, I understand," he answered, a little impatiently. He addressed the Canoness, but kept looking at Nathalie.

The young girl understood this look, and she resolved to efface by the gravity of her consent, whatever sense of triumph in him, or mortification in her, it might create.

"It shall now be as you like," she said, very seriously, and meeting his look as she spoke.

There was a brief silence. Aunt Radegonde vainly compressed her lips to conceal her smile of triumph; for it was one of her weaknesses to imagine every favourable event in which she was even slightly concerned as the result of the most deeply-laid schemes and diplomacy on her part.

"It would have been a broken match without me and my managing," she shrewdly thought; and again looking at them both, she smiled openly; but a cloud soon came over her cheerful face. They sat side by side indeed, but with glances which if not averted from one another, were certainly not likely to meet; Monsieur de Sainville was looking at the sky before him; Nathalie's eyes were bent upon the ground at her feet; neither spoke, and yet, though the Canoness knew it not, they might then be as near and understand one another as well as in utter solitude, "It is an explanation they want," thought she.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she suddenly exclaimed aloud, "I have forgotten my knitting; only think of that, Armand; only think of that, Petite!"

She rose as she spoke thus, and alas! left them alone.

It was evening; the sun was setting fast; the blue of heaven was deepening at the zenith; but from the western horizon a flood of golden light poured over the garden and the surrounding grounds. The first days of summer had come, and the trees were in all their verdure and beauty; but in the warm light which now fell upon them, they seemed to have borrowed some of the rich hues of autumn; even the dark masses of evergreens in the background had caught a rosy flush from the setting sun, and the stately cedar rose against the blue sky, unstirred by a breath from heaven. Everything spoke harmony, loveliness and peace.

Monsieur de Sainville looked thoughtful.

"What is he going to say?" thought Nathalie, who felt her heart beating fast. It was now a long time since they had met thus alone. Nathalie was in a mood when the affections, and the affections only, are easily swayed. With a few kind words her lover might have obtained any concession from her; she felt tired of rebellion; it would have gladdened her to submit, but to submit because her heart longed for it, certainly not because it was expedient, or even just. Unfortunately Monsieur de Sainville neither saw nor suspected this. He

concluded, as most men would have concluded in his place, that his coldness had given the young girl a somewhat severe but upon the whole a salutary lesson, and that for their mutual happiness it would be proper to keep this up a little longer. The temper of his future bride had of late given him some uneasiness. He began to think that he had been too indulgent; that he had mistaken her; that she was not so easily swayed as he had first imagined; above all, that their married life would require a greater display of will on his part than he had anticipated. Monsieur de Sainville liked to rule, but not to command. He wished his authority to be so well established, that whilst rebellion remained out of the question, every appearance of subjection should be carefully avoided. He would by no means deprive Nathalie of the wild grace which freedom gives—a grace which became her so well that it seemed her own peculiarity. Nay; he even liked her to resist his will, provided she ended by yielding. He wished his yoke to seem as light as it was firm in reality. But for this, it was necessary Nathalie should understand him plainly; at the same time, this was not a thing easily put in words; therefore he hesitated. He spoke at length. The young girl had been abandoning herself to the soothing charm of the hour then

"Quiet as a nun
Breathless with admiration."

The divine peace of earth and sky seemed to have

entered her heart. She felt as if this were the time for a happy reconciliation, and wondered how he would address her after a tacit quarrel of three weeks; how he would excuse his coldness, and seek to soothe her wounded pride. He did neither; in gentle, though firm language, he proved to her that she had been much in the wrong; that they had both been unhappy; that such misunderstandings would render any married life miserable; that there was only one safe cure for such cases—authority on the side of the husband, and submission on that of the wife. Nathalie looked up incredulously into his face.

"Surely I have misunderstood you," she said; "you do not mean to say a woman must obey her husband!"

"I assure you such is my opinion," he seriously replied.

"Would you expect your wife to obey you?" she promptly asked.

"Under certain restrictions, I should."

He spoke without the least hesitation. Yet Nathalie looked up into his face with lingering doubt. "This is only a trial," she thought. He resumed:

"I do not understand by obedience a servile submission which it would be as degrading to exact as to yield; but that trust and confidence which induces a woman to submit, not blindly, but willingly, to the guidance of him to whom she has confided her destiny."

"I might agree with you if he were her father," coldly said Nathalie.

"A woman's husband ought to have all the authority of a father," gravely replied Monsieur de Sainville.

"And of a master, it would seem," bitterly exclaimed Nathalie, who on this subject had all the rebellious feelings of her sex.

"I am sorry you take this view of the subject," he calmly resumed. "I had hoped to convince you of the soundness of my views. You cannot but acknowledge that we have not of late been quite happy. No married life carried on in this spirit would be endurable. And why? Because you have refused to yield, when it would have been right to do so. Was I not justified in dismissing Jean, without forgiving him at your request, or entering into a painful explanation? Was I not equally justified in urging an immediate union, when delay led to such unpleasant consequences? You, unfortunately, had not confidence enough in me to recognize or admit this; there is but one possible remedy—your promise to yield to me for the future."

"And why should I yield?" impetuously asked Nathalie, who felt much irritated at his coldness.

"Remember," he continued, without answering, "that I speak not of servile submission, but of a noble feeling of confidence. It is impossible you should think I wish to play the tyrant with you.

But remember the difference of our dispositions and our years. I love you with the authority and tenderness of a father. You are very young, and very heedless; you must be both my wife and my child."

"I will not!" exclaimed Nathalie, stung by this promise of paternal affection. "I will not be your daughter, or yield you the obedience of one. I feel myself your equal; as such I will be treated."

He waited until she was less excited, then said, with a coolness that only seemed to increase as she lost her composure:

"I do not question our equality, I merely say that our positions will be different. What is the feeling that constitutes a happy marriage? Faith on either side: in man, as an entire faith in the love and truth of her he has chosen; in woman, as a boundless trust in the honour of her husband. I ask you to have that trust in me. You cannot imagine that under the pretence of authority I shall seek to interfere with every detail of your existence. If you do, indeed, you think me a tyrant in your heart, however much you may deny it with your lips. All I want is to be your guide and friend. Domestic strife is the bane of marriage; let us avoid it. Promise when our wills are at variance, that your's will yield to mine, not because I am your superior, but because my years and experience enable me to judge and decide better than you can."

All this might be very reasonable, but logic

always chilled Nathalie. Unfortunately, those who loved her best never seemed aware that she thought with her heart. Monsieur de Sainville's cold language fell on her warm southern feelings like the icy breeze of some northern shore. "Oh, no," she thought, with a swelling heart, as her hopes of a happy reconciliation were thus dispelled, "No, he never has loved me, or he would not now speak so coldly!" and tears which she could not repress dimmed her eyes.

Monsieur de Sainville completely misunderstood her emotion. He thought she was yielding, but deploring at the same time the necessity of being obliged to yield.

"Is it possible," he asked, a little impatiently, "that the prospect of yielding up your will to mine now and then—for it would be no more—can shock you so much?"

Nathalie gave him a look of sorrowful reproach.

"I am not thinking of that," she sadly said, "but I am thinking that after being to me more distant than the merest stranger for three weeks, this cold wisdom is all you find to say now. Oh!" added she, in a low and beseeching tone, "if you do indeed wish me to obey you, ask me in some other way to do so, and I may perhaps subdue my pride so far; but do not try to prove to me that I must, —that it is a duty; that if I refuse, all happiness is gone. Oh! the heart has arguments worth all your logic. Say it is something you desire, and I will grant it without caring what or why."

Her voice trembled slightly as she spoke.

Monsieur de Sainville neither replied nor turned towards her, and yet he was not unmoved. Had he at that moment followed the impulse of his heart, he would have spoken very tenderly, nor uttered another word about that promise of obedience which it had cost him more to mention than Nathalie, from his calm manner, imagined. But he knew that if he now yielded to this impulse, it would be to repent it for ever, and he therefore firmly resisted it. Besides, in his cold and rigid honesty he would have scrupled to avail himself of a moment's yielding tenderness. "Poor child!" he thought, "she has a kind and affectionate heart; and yet I must wait until by-and-bye to tell her how dearly I prize it. For her own good, I must first convince her that it is right and necessary I should have a proper control over that stubborn little will and that flighty temper of her's.

"My dear child," said he, aloud, a little more kindly, but quite as coldly as before, "you mistake me; this is no matter of feeling; I do not appeal to your heart, but to your judgment; I do not wish to influence,—I wish to convince you."

Nathalie smiled bitterly. He spoke kindly, but she felt chilled and repelled; all her best feelings seemed thrown back upon her as weak and worthless things.

"Of what do you wish to convince me?" she asked, in a low tone.

"That for the sake of our mutual happiness it

will be just that you should sometimes—I shall rarely claim the right—obey me."

Much in life depends upon a word. In spite of his unaltered coldness and inflexible tone, Nathalie might have yielded, but the word "obey" revolted her as a gratuitous insult. Her colour rose, her look lost all at once its usual softness, and her very lips trembled with indignation as she cried vehemently,

"I will not obey you."

"Then you mistrust me," said he, with a frown. "You have no confidence in my justice; none in my honour. You think I would make an unworthy use of my power."

"I neither know nor care," disdainfully replied Nathalie, who now felt perfectly reckless; "but I declare to you that I will not obey you or promise to do so."

She rose as she spoke thus with equal decision and energy. Monsieur de Sainville saw at once that his advantage was gone, but he would not stoop to compromise or utter a word to win back what he had lost. Theoretically, love may be all the pure gold of devotion; practically, it is alloyed with the meaner metal of other passions. In Monsieur de Sainville's case, it blended with pride and inflexible will. He rose also.

"Nathalie," said he, with a sort of angry calmness, which she knew well, "the happiness of our whole existence is at stake. I ask you once more, will you become my wife, and promise to obey me?"

Nathalie loved him, but she too was passionate and proud. Her colour deepened as she replied, in broken tones:

"I understand you, and I reject your conditions. I will not become your wife if I may not be such without obeying you. I release you from a tie which has of late become a burden to you; which perhaps was always so. Let us part; we are not fit for one another. You do not love me. You never loved me truly; and I feel I could not long love one who seeks not a wife but a slave."

Monsieur de Sainville became extremely pale; of that livid pallor which indicates repressed anger; but he said, in his coldest tones:

"Be it so."

He turned away as he spoke, without giving her time to recover, answer, or retract. She stood in the same spot, motionless as a statue, and well-nigh as pale, listening to the sound of his receding steps on the gravel of the lime-tree avenue. At length the sound ceased; the library door had closed upon him.

Until then Nathalie did not seem to have the full consciousness of what had really happened; but that sound sent a strange pang through her heart; and all at once the thought that everything was over, broke on her with a force so terrible and so awful, that it seemed to crush her. She sank down on the bench—the same on which they had both sat a few minutes back—conscious of nothing save his last words: "Be it so."

She bowed her head in her hands, and felt like those on whom the irrevocable sentence has been passed.

How long or how short a time she remained thus, Nathalie did not know. She was roused by a voice observing, close to her:

"Petite, why on earth do you stay here? The dew is falling."

The words reached her ear, but their meaning seemed vague and indistinct, like something heard in a dream. Yet she looked up. Evening was closing in; the lime-trees cast their deep shadow around her; the air was grey and chill; Aunt Radegonde stood before her. Even in this indistinct light, the Canoness was struck with the young girl's pallor and altered features.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she agitatedly exclaimed; "what has happened? Why are you here alone? Where is Armand?"

Nathalie looked at her drearily. "Where is Armand?" Oh, who would ever ask that question of her again, and when would she reply, "He is here," or "He is coming!"

"Petite!" beseechingly exclaimed the Canoness, "Oh! tell me what it is that has happened?"

Nathalie did not reply; she rose with an effort, put on her bonnet and scarf, which lay on the bench, then bent down, kissed the Canoness, and, in a low tone, dropped the words, "Good bye."

"No, not good bye; not good bye," cried Aunt

Radegonde, very much agitated; "it is only good night; you go early, because your sister wants you; you will come back to-morrow; the day is fixed, I know. Come, Petite, do not be foolish; do not talk so."

"Good bye," again said Nathalie, in a low tone.

The poor Canoness sank down on the seat lately occupied by the young girl.

"I knew it," she cried; "yes, I knew it from the first. What has his love ever brought, save misery? Oh! he is a hard-hearted tyrant. God forgive him; God forgive him; I cannot."

She said no more, but burst into tears. Nathalie kissed her once more, and wished to turn away, but the Canoness pressed her to her bosom, and wept again.

"You will come and see me," she said.

Nathalie shook her head, and disengaged herself from her embrace without answering. Yet, before going, she gave one look to the scenes of so many joys and such bitter grief. Everything looked vague and indistinct in the twilight, and the low sound of the little fountain alone disturbed the deep silence. Aunt Radegonde was sitting on the bench in a sorrowful and desolate attitude; her pale figure and wistful look ever came back to Nathalie, with the memory of that hour of sorrow.

She had passed through the garden, crossed the court, and entered the house. As she reached the passage leading to the hall, the library door opened,

and Monsieur de Sainville came out. Nathalie recognised him by the light of the lamp, which fell full on his features. She could not retrace her steps without being heard, and therefore remained standing where she was, in the deep shadow of the staircase; but instead of going up to the drawing-room, as she thought he would, Monsieur de Sainville came precisely to the spot where she stood. He did not see her until they stood face to face. All the blood in Nathalie's frame rushed tumultuously to her heart; but she neither moved nor spoke. He, as pale, silent, and yet as agitated as the young girl, stood equally irresolute. At first, he seemed inclined to move on, but he suddenly changed his resolve; and, taking both her hands in his, drew her forward to the light, and looked at her fixedly. Before she could recover from the surprise into which this sudden act had thrown her, he had dropped her hands, opened the door leading to the court, and was gone.

For a few minutes, Nathalie remained motionless on the spot where he had left her. She remembered the evening when he had told her that he wanted to look at her, because he was going away for a fortnight; but then his look was not so sad, so grave, nor, alas! so brief.

Rose was in her room undressing when her sister entered it. One look at Nathalie's pale face told her all that had happened. She had long foreseen this, yet the shock made her turn pale, and drew from her an exclamation of sorrow; but she asked no explanation.

"I will tell you all some day," said Nathalie, in a low tone. "Be merciful, and do not question me now."

She sat down on a chair, and buried her face in her hands. She remained there for several hours, and would not go to bed until near daylight. When she at length lay down by the side of her sister, Rose half-raised herself on one elbow, and watched her anxiously. She was motionless, but evidently not asleep; the dull morning light added to the waxen pallor of her features; her hands lay folded on her bosom; her eyes were closed, but no tears stole from beneath the sealed eyelids. She never spoke once, nor did Rose address her: for the sorrow that will not reveal itself in words, language has no consolation.

Nathalie rose with her sister. It was early still, as the deep quietness of heaven and earth revealed. She opened the window, unclosed the shutters, and sat down, leaning her brow against the iron bar of the little balcony. The rosy light of the rising sun fell on the old abbey and on the little churchyard beyond; the breeze was cool and pure; there was something holy in this quiet time. But its repose was lost on the young girl. Oh! how often will troubled human hearts quarrel with the eternal peace and loveliness of nature.

"You will get cold, if you sit thus in your night-dress," said Rose, closing the window as she spoke thus, chiefly for the purpose of extracting some reply; but Nathalie gave her none. She merely

drew her chair near the table, and, with a pencil, began writing a few hurried lines on a slip of paper. Scarcely, however, was this done, when she tore what she had written, almost angrily; rose, walked up and down the room, and slowly returned to her seat to write once more. She folded up the slip of paper in the shape of a note, held it for a few minutes between her fingers, and at length, with evident effort, handed it to her sister, who now stood dressed before her.

"Rose," said she, in a low, steady voice, but without looking at her, "you will take this immediately, you know where and to whom. See no one save the person for whom this is destined."

"Very well," replied Rose, "I shall do so."

She looked compassionately at her sister, but Nathalie avoided the glance with evident pain.

An hour elapsed before Rose entered once more the house of Madame Lavigne. But that she always looked thus, one would have said that Rose now looked very grave and sad. She slowly ascended the staircase leading to her room. She seemed to know without inquiry that there, and there only, she would find her sister. She was there, indeed, dressed now, but sitting in the same place and almost in the same attitude. She looked up as Rose entered; their eyes met, but neither spoke.

"Well," at length said Nathalie, speaking with evident effort; "you have been there, Rose, have you not?"

"Yes, I have been there."

"And you—you—I mean you gave the letter. What! did you leave it?" she added, with sudden terror as Rose did not reply. "Rose, you cannot have left it; it was not sealed."

Rose did not answer; but with averted look, silently handed a slip of paper to her sister; it fell from Nathalie's hand; for on opening it, she recognized what she had herself written. Her head drooped on her bosom, and she clasped her hands, as she exclaimed in a low tone:

"Returned! To what other humiliation am I reserved? And returned unread, no doubt?" she added, with an inquiring and wistful glance at her sister. "Well, no matter, do not turn away your head or look so sad, my poor Rose. I have often heard him say the time has long gone by when women died of grief."

Rose seemed strangely moved, but did not answer.

"But he shall, but he must hear me," exclaimed Nathalie, with a burst of sudden and despairing grief. "I am not proud, I care nothing about pride; where there is love, there is no pride. I have a right to be heard; yesterday I was his affianced wife, it cannot be that I am nothing to him to-day. Let him, let the world say what they like—I say it is love and not the word of mayor or blessing of priest that makes marriage. He will not read my letter—he shall hear me. If he will not see me, I will wait for him by the road-side; I know well the

road he takes, and I care not how long I wait, nor who sees me, but come what will, I say he shall hear me."

"Hush! do not talk so," said Rose; "your letter was not returned."

"Not returned! Why then did you bring it back? Ah! I understand," she agitatedly added, "you came from me and were therefore refused admittance. Well, you are right, Rose, it was foolish in me to talk so. No, I shall not trouble him with my presence or with my words."

Rose turned towards her with an expression of deep sadness; their looks met once more. A sudden terror seemed to seize on Nathalie, for she rose and clasped her hands.

"Rose," she cried, "do not look thus and be so silent. No, it is not true; I am sure he is not gone. I am sure he is not. Oh! tell me that he will come back, sister; be merciful, tell me something."

Her voice sank down to a low and despairing tone, soon broken by convulsive sobs.

"Alas! my poor child," sadly replied Rose, "would I might have spared you this bitter trial; but it is the will of God."

She handed her another letter as she spoke.

Nathalie took it; she was very pale, and as she held it unopened for awhile, her hand shook visibly. With an effort, she broke the seal, but a mist was on her eyes; the characters looked illegible and dim. She handed the letter to her sister, and said, in a low tone:—

"Read it to me, Rose; you read another letter once, not so very long ago, but rather different from this, I dare say."

Rose read. The letter was from Monsieur de Sainville—a last farewell letter—calm, indulgent, and very kind. He laid no blame to Nathalie, and took some to himself. "It was not," he wrote, "merely on account of what had passed between them on the previous day that they parted, but because they had loved most unwisely. Our natures," he pursued, "could never have harmonized. You would have thought me cold and indifferent, and I should have wearied of those doubts and unexpressed reproaches. I once thought the great difference between us favourable to our mutual affection; I have lived to expiate this bitter mistake. Believe me, my dear child, it is far better to part now than to discover our error later. Harsh, yet true philosophy! To say we shall not both suffer would be folly. Suffer we must, for we both love, and must for a long time love still. But time, as you too will live to know, cures many wounds. I leave to-morrow early; we shall not meet again, for a long time, at least. Perhaps your feelings are very bitter against me; yet I have a favour to ask, and by the memory of a happier time, I conjure you to grant it: do not forsake my poor aunt. Twice have I involuntarily been to her the cause of the same bitter sorrow; do not, I beseech you, abandon her. It will be long, very long, years perhaps, before my presence need

disturb you in that house which I had once thought would be your own home.

"I know not how you will receive this request, for I know not how you think of me,—resentfully, I dare say. Do you imagine, then, that this separation is not to me also the source of bitter pain? And yet I have a consolation which, if I understand your character rightly, will be denied you. For, whereas you will do all you can to cast me from your heart, I shall still cherish the memory of the past, and of everything which, from the first, made you dear. I have always loved you with a truer affection than you imagined; I call it truer, because I feel even now, that though it may change in nature, it cannot change in sincerity."

Rose ceased. Her sister looked up.

"Rose," she said, "there is more, I am sure, turn over the page; there must be something else—a postscript: look."

Rose silently handed her the letter. There was nothing else, save the word "farewell," which, in pity to her feelings, Rose had not read aloud. Nathalie glanced over the paper, put it by, and sat down near the table, in a listless and dreary attitude. Her sister stood before her, eyeing her with the sadness always inspired by the consciousness of unavailing sympathy.

"What can I do for you, my poor child?" she gently asked.

"Nothing, Rose, save to leave me alone for a while; I will soon go down."

Rose silently complied. After a while Nathalie took up the letter again, read it, and remained tearless. This was no time for the luxury of weeping; she had wept before, happy tears, in which hope and gleams of joy blended with sadness; but this foolish time was over now; the hour for real sorrow had come at last.

It was a genial morning, of summer's earliest and most lovely days. The sun shone brightly; its warmth was tempered by the fresh and pleasant breeze which came in to her, through the open window. A few children played in the churchyard beyond, the sound of their laughter rose pleasantly on the ear; the rooks cawed and wheeled around the old tower opposite; a servant maid in her high Norman cap and clattering *sabots*, sang in the court below, as she filled her pitcher of water from the fountain; Nathalie saw and heard all this drearily; a load of misery was at her heart. She wondered how the sky could be so bright and blue, when the sunshine of life was departed. How others could laugh and sing, when the delight of her existence had vanished for ever. She read the letter again; not once, or twice, but over and over. She dwelt on each word,—and she was ingenious in giving it the most painful meaning—so that its sting might enter her heart more surely; that she might quaff her cup to its bitterest dregs, and not be cheated out of one drop of her woe. For when she saw how miserable

she was, she remembered how happy she might have been.

"I am nothing, it seems, but the merest stranger to him, now," she thought, with a swelling heart, "but I might have been his wife, and I would have made him love me truly. I should have spent my life with him, been the mistress of his household, the sharer of his joys, and of his sorrows, if he had any. He would have left me occasionally, but I should have liked it. How pleasant to wait and watch for his return, and feel gladdened by the sound of his step; how much more pleasant still to meet his smile, and listen to his greeting!" She broke off, for she had been forgetting herself, and losing the truth in a dream. "And now," she thought, despairingly, "it is all over, and even the hope of this must never return. And my own folly has done it all. Had I the shadow of a wish to quarrel with him for power? Why did I not speak, when we met last night, and he looked the farewell he perchance did not know how to utter? He was mine, then, and for that moment. Why did I let him go so silently? Why was my foolish heart so full, that words arose to my lips, and only died away unuttered?"

She bowed her head, and for the first time wept long and bitterly.

The morning was over when Nathalie went down stairs. Désirée was ill, and Rose had to attend to household matters. The blind woman sat alone in her usual place; she reclined in her arm-chair, with

her head thrown back, and her sightless eyes turned towards the light, which appeared to her like a faint white gleam; her hands lay folded on her knees —she looked fretful.

"I wonder what you have been doing up-stairs all this time?" she peevishly asked.

Without answering, Nathalie took the seat usually occupied by Rose, and continued her sister's interrupted task; but it soon dropped from her hands, and this the blind woman's acute ear detected.

"You are not sewing," she said; "I do not hear the sound of your needle and thread."

Nathalie did not reply. She was thinking that her old existence had begun anew. For a while she had entered the charmed island of promise which had so long receded before her. She had rejoiced in its beauty and tasted the sweetness of its waters; but now she was cast back on the dreary and desolate shore of her former existence. Hope had once lured her on; despair was her guide and companion now. The love she had given so willingly was rudely rejected; the love for which she longed was sternly withheld. She might thirst in vain along the dreary desert of life, no hand for which she cared would bring her the cup of living waters to quench her spirit's burning thirst; she might feel weak and sinking, no protecting arm would sustain her in that wearisome journey; she might droop and weep, no bosom would be her haven of rest. To render her fate more bitter, she was gifted with memory; she

could remember that a happier destiny had once awaited her; that she who was now an exile, had been blessed with home and native land. Then came the ever-tormenting thought, that by her own hand had this bitter fate been wrought. She might have avoided it—she knew him—his sternness and his iron will—the struggle between passion and resentful severity which had opened his existence as a man: but at her cost this time had the bitter victory been won.

"You will neither talk nor work; you are abominably selfish," exclaimed Madame Lavigne, indignantly.

Nathalie said nothing. She scarcely heard her.

"Give me a cushion to put behind my back," said the blind woman, exasperated at her silence.

Nathalie rose and complied apathetically. In returning to her seat she chanced to cast an abstracted glance at the mirror. She paused, wondering at the strange image it revealed. Oh! this was not the light-hearted and blooming maiden, with look so free, and smile so hopeful, whom she remembered seeing there but yesterday; that pale, mournful face, listless look, an drooping figure, belonged to some other. She now beheld a suffering woman, young still in form and feature, but with years of sorrow on her brow.

CHAPTER VII.

Frivolous and capricious in temper, like a true daughter of the south, Nathalie was not frivolous at heart. What she felt, she felt passionately, whether in good or ill; but even her deepest feelings were subject to the sudden changes of her temper. She always felt as much in the main, but she often felt differently.

At first she had been bitter in her reproaches and self-accusations. It was her own folly had done it all; she might, had she been wise, have been the happiest of women. But gradually other feelings came to her; she no longer thought that she was alone to blame.

Had Monsieur de Sainville ever truly loved one he could so readily relinquish? He knew her with all her faults, her waywardness, and caprice; could he not have been more forbearing? He could! she resentfully felt it; but he had been as stern and

relentless with her as if she were something to crush and subdue, and not one to love and cherish. He had seized on the words uttered in a moment of passion; and yet he acknowledged to her that it was not by those words that they were parted. It would have been soothing to her pride—though a most bitter thought—if she could have imagined that this separation was her own act, and her's only. He took care to inform her that it was not so; and she was reduced to feel glad that he had not received and read the submissive and despairing letter which she had written to him, after a night of misery. How would he have received it? With the pity and contempt which she knew that he felt for weakness.

But what stung her most deeply, was his promise of continued affection. If he had only spoken vindictively, yes, even with hatred, she could have forgiven him; for in the depth of his anger she would also have read the depth of his self-inflicted wound. But never, alas! was lover's farewell more calm or less impassioned.

Many days elapsed before Nathalie could be induced to see Aunt Radegonde in that dwelling where she had been so happy and so wretched. The gentle Canoness visited her once or twice, but she was effectually scared away by the ill-tempered growling of Madame Lavigne.

"My dear child," she whispered to Nathalie in the door-way, "how can you live with that dreadful

woman? Do you think she is really blind? I can assure you I have my suspicions on that subject, and you know my penetration. Oh! do, Petite, do come back to live with me."

Nathalie shook her head, and replied in a low tone, that this was impossible.

"Well then, come and see me," urged the poor Canoness; "I am dying of *ennui* in that great château; even Amanda has left me, though I offered to raise her wages if she would only stay. The girl declared that she could not, that the people here were so *arrièré*, so void of ideas, it was impossible to consort with them. Think, Petite, how I must feel it, and do come and see me sometimes. I have come here twice, but really I cannot come again, for that dreadful blind woman looked—and I am sure she sees—as if she would turn me out the next time. Oh! do come."

Nathalie promised to call on her old friend; but some time elapsed ere she kept her word. On a bright summer evening she at length left the dull house in the court, and went up to the château. She walked slowly, for a heavy and unconquerable sadness was at her heart. The little town had formerly been surrounded by a wall; a few broken portions of it still remained, and at the extremity of the steep street which verged into the road leading to the château stood the arch of an old ruined gateway. It was near that very spot they had parted one evening, when by the clear moonlight she had read in his glance such deep, and as she then thought,

unconquerable affection. She paused, hesitatingly, near the spot; had there been another path she would have taken it. It is a dreary thing to see with a changed heart the unchanged places where we have left a portion of our former existence, and which, alas! are too often the only things that keep faithfully the dreams and hopes of our past. Nathalie did not look around her; she kept her eyes fixed on the old gate; on the burning horizon, which seemed to pass behind it like a line of glowing fire; on the west, where the setting sun shot forth long slanting rays of dazzling light that streamed along the winding road and passed beneath the arch, giving a mellower tint to the stones embrowned by age and overrun with clustering ivy. The air was pure and still; not a breath moved the creeping plants, which sprang thick and luxuriant from every dark cranny of the ruin; and the slender grasses growing betwixt the highest stones rose straight and still on the blue sky unstirred by the faintest breeze. But in vain did Nathalie seek to fix her look on the splendour of the setting sun, or on the serene beauty of the evening sky. In vain did she seek to avoid glancing at the spot where they had both lingered together. Her heart would throb and her eyes turn towards it as she passed it by. A peasant youth and a pretty Norman girl were now standing there conversing in low whispered tones. A jealous pang shot through Nathalie's heart, and she involuntarily paused to look at them for a moment. "What had they come there

for?" she thought; "were there no other places where lovers might meet and talk of love, hope and happiness—all things lost to her for ever?"

The Canoness was sitting alone in the drawing-room. She uttered an exclamation of joy as Nathalie entered, but it was soon checked by the young girl's pale aspect and desolate look.

"Pauvre Petite!" said she, kissing Nathalie, and taking both her hands in her own, whilst tears gathered in her eyes; "it was very kind in you to come. Yes, very kind indeed; for it is plain you do not like it. Oh! can I ever forgive Armand?"

"Let us talk of something else," quickly interrupted Nathalie.

But in spite of their mutual efforts, the conversation ever returned to this theme, and at length Nathalie ceased to check it.

Who knows but that as she sat there at the feet of her old friend, in her old attitude, with her head bowed and resting on her hands, she did not feel a strange and bitter pleasure in hearing mentioned that name, which, in spite of resentment and pride, still troubled and haunted her heart.

At first the Canoness was very indignant and prodigal of accusations; but when her long-repressed anger was thus disburthened, she softened gradually, and, without justifying her nephew, she spoke of him with less asperity.

"You see, Petite," she observed, with a sigh, "he is a cold, reasonable man, whom passion will never

blind. If he was so in youth, is it astonishing he should be so still? We spoke long together on the evening before he went. I said many bitter things; he heard me very patiently, and replied, that he understood my anger, and that as it proceeded from love for you, he only liked me the better for it."

"'She shall always be dear to me as my own child,' he said. 'I once had other hopes; but it may not be. You must have her here with you, aunt; the close air of that court where her sister lives would ruin her health. If she looks pale and ill, procure her diversions, whether she will or not. A little travelling would do you both good. Why should you not go together to Provence; we have some friends there, and Petite would like to see her native Arles once more.'

"'Then you love her still, Armand?' I could not help saying.

"'As my own child,' he said again. He spoke so seriously, that I asked—perhaps it was scarcely right—'how he would like to see you married to another?'"

"What did he say?" inquired Nathalie, suddenly looking up.

"Nothing at first; but to judge by his moody look and compressed lips, it seemed no very pleasant idea. 'She will not think of that just yet,' he at length replied; 'and when she does think of it, I have no doubt that I shall have grown equally reconciled to what is now inevitable.'"

"Inevitable!" bitterly said Nathalie.

"My dear child," nervously observed the Canoness, "I am very sorry to have repeated all this; for, to tell you the truth, Armand made me give my word of honour that it would remain a secret between us, and that I would induce you to come here on my own account, without so much as mentioning his name. Of course I should have kept the secret (you know my reserve), if it had not unfortunately slipped out. Indeed, Petite, you must not be too angry with Armand. He is still very much attached to you. There is nothing he desires more than for you to remain here. My belief is, that he contemplates ultimately adopting you as his daughter,—a much wiser plan than the old one. Indeed I always thought it strange so prudent a man should have thought of marrying a mere child; but I suppose the wisest have their moments of folly. *Entre nous*, Petite, I think your exciteable little head deceived you; and that you never really loved him. I need not tell you that if you agree to this, you will be doing Charles no wrong. From the first I saw, with my usual penetration, that his uncle did not like him much; whereas you were always quite a pet of his. Oh! Petite, it will be much more pleasant thus. As for marrying, I am convinced you never will. I shall find so many good arguments, that I really must end by convincing you of the beauties of female celibacy. And when we are all three together ——"

"Do not mention it," almost indignantly interrupted Nathalie; "such a thing is impossible."

"And why so, Petite?" quietly asked the Canoness; "I tell you Armand is as fond of you as if you were his own child. He has said so; and he never tells an untruth. Of course when love—which makes all the mischief in this world—is out of the question, there will be no more quarrelling."

Oh, poignant truth! which Nathalie felt in the deepest recesses of her heart. Yes, indeed, when love was gone, they might both live in peace under the same roof which was once to have sheltered them, not as two, but as one,—made such by what in her faith Nathalie held as the divine sacrament of marriage.

She resented the language of the Canoness as cruel and unfeeling; yet reflection assured her that it was not so, and that if Aunt Radegonde spoke thus calmly, it was because what then passed in Nathalie's heart was, and had ever been to her, as an unheard and unspoken language.

The young girl went home that evening with another torturing thought in her heart. Monsieur de Sainville still felt much kindness and affection for her, but an affection which she resented more than indifference. For love has many nice and jealous distinctions; it will have all or nothing, and scorns a part where it gives the whole. The thought that she had never been loved save as a pleasant and

piquant companion, to be still retained even when the project of making her a wife had been abandoned, was a source of ceaseless torment, for it robbed her even of the past, that last refuge of the unhappy.

For the first time since his departure, she spoke openly to Rose. They were sitting upstairs in that little room which had once heard such different confessions. Nathalie told her sister all; the cause of their separation, his harshness, what Aunt Radegonde had mentioned, and her own bitter and burning resentment.

"I will never forgive him; no, not even in my heart," she passionately exclaimed. "What his aunt once told me is true, Rose; that man has a heart of stone. Woe and misery to the women who love such men!"

"Alas! why do you not say woe to the women who love at all?" sadly replied Rose. "My poor child, women are idolaters; why, then, should they not suffer? Their adoration is a fallen angel worshipping earthly idols within sight of heaven. But one woman have I known happy in her love, and she died a week ago. She was poor, plain, and no longer young, but she must have been happy, for she was truly loved. When her relatives came to claim the little she had left, her husband meekly submitted, and asked to keep nothing of what she had brought him save the pillow on which her head had first rested beneath his roof. Oh! pure and

faithful must have been the heart, who, when she died, a wan, faded woman, after years of toil, saw her as fresh and as lovely as on the bridal day!"

"Oh! you may well call her happy, Rose," said Nathalie, with much bitterness.

"But it was a poor earthly happiness after all," replied Rose; "see how pitilessly it was cut short by death. Oh! Nathalie, set not your heart too much on things of this world; one grave shall receive the loved and the unloved, and when earth has covered them over, who shall tell the difference?"

Rose was standing near the window, in the moonlight, as she spoke thus. The tallow light they had brought up had burned away in its socket whilst they talked together, but a clear summer moon gave light enough to their narrow room. Nathalie sat, half-undressed, on the edge of the bed; she looked at her sister, and wondered whether it was the wan light now falling on her features that made her look so pale.

"Rose!" she suddenly exclaimed, "are you well?"

"Yes, pretty well."

But her voice was languishing and low. A thought which in her happiness, and in the subsequent misery, had never come to Nathalie, now suddenly smote her heart. She remembered signs long unheeded, or scarcely understood at the time, and for a while she forgot all about the past or present of her love.

"Rose," she anxiously said, "I feel sure you are not well."

"I have not been quite well of late," was the calm reply.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" cried Nathalie, in an agitated tone, "and I never noticed it. How cruelly selfish I have been, Rose."

She left her place, kissed her sister, and wept.

"But child, I am not so very ill," said Rose, smiling faintly.

"Oh, Rose! it is not merely of your illness, I think, but also of my ingratitude in not noticing it before."

She seemed, and was really grieved, and Rose did not seek to comfort her. She thought that any diversion to her feelings, however painful, would be beneficial to her sister, and therefore allowed her to upbraid herself freely. But the diversion was brief. Rose, whose health had really been failing, partly recovered, and Nathalie became accustomed to the slight signs of ill-health which remained behind. It seemed natural for Rose to be so pale, and to speak in that subdued tone.

In the meanwhile it was agreed that Nathalie should remain with her sister. Rose wished it; she thought she could best combat the young girl's melancholy—she might indeed elsewhere, but the readiness with which Nathalie acceded to her desire, ought to have shown her the dangerous pleasure her sister was likely to find in this excessive retirement.

To Rose this life was natural and congenial; she had submitted to it in the spirit of a martyr, and because it had purified and exalted her nature: she concluded it would do the same for Nathalie. But she had only dreams, vain shadows of the heart, to conquer, and her sister had its most burning reality —a deep, impassioned love to subdue. Religion and duty had been enough for the elder sister, but more was needed for Nathalie. She should have gone forth to seek forgetfulness, have entered into some of the active struggles of existence, have known want and care; and these stern guides might, perhaps, have led her through many a rugged path to the feet of peace. She knew this, and shrank from it with dread; she did not wish to forget, to be cured; she feared the solitude and indifference of the heart, which prudence told her to seek. She loved to brood over the sorrow which had become part of her being. At another freer and happier period of her existence, she would have considered it a most miserable destiny to be condemned to live with Madame Lavigne and Rose in this dreary solitude; but now the case was altered. Nathalie no longer felt alone; the past went with her wherever she moved; it wrapt her within its mournful shadow; it was not in Madame Lavigne's house that she lived, but in a haunted world, for which she would have dreaded the open light of day. She had come to the dangerous point of loving the fever which fed and consumed her being.

Now that Nathalie had once more lost her gaiety, her presence was anything but acceptable to the blind aunt of Rose. She complained; her niece resisted firmly and gently. She only wanted her sister to remain a few months with her, and when summer was over, she would find her another home. Madame Lavigne grumbled, but the purpose of Rose was not to be changed. Nathalie remained passive and indifferent. She saw that to Rose these contests were rendered painless by habit, and she herself became so much accustomed to Madame Lavigne's eternal reproaches, that they fell unheeded on her ear, and made no more impression upon it than the monotonous voice of falling waters to those who live within their ceaseless and rushing sound. In her better moments, Nathalie struggled against the torpor in all things save one, into which she was gradually sinking. She tried to live to reality, instead of leading a false and charmed life; but the silent house, with only the ticking of the clock, and the monotonous grumbling of Madame Lavigne to break on its stillness, with its dull subdued light and cheerless aspect, led her back almost inevitably to the land of the dreamy past. She even began to love her prison; like a nun accustomed to the deep shadow of the cloister, she shrank from the glare of day, and found both protection and freedom in the very routine which now shrouded her existence.

Thus passed away the summer.

Abstracted and wrapped in her own thoughts as

she was, Nathalie saw that her sister was gradually though visibly declining. Even Madame Lavigne became conscious of this fact, and listened uneasily to the short and painful breathing of her niece.

"How does she look?" she once asked of Nathalie.

"Very pale and thin."

"But not very ill?" rejoined Madame Lavigne; "she has always been so, you know."

"Rose looks ill, madame."

"But why should she look ill? she has enough to eat and drink, surely? I stint her in nothing. Is it air she wants, let her go out and take plenty of exercise. But the truth of it is she is not ill at all, and this is only your foolish imagining."

"I imagine nothing," gravely replied Nathalie, "but I see, and cannot help remembering that Rose's mother was consumptive."

"But she is not," angrily cried the blind woman. "You cruel girl, how dare you say so of your own sister? Do you mean to say that Rose is going to die? Good heavens!" she added, wringing her hands with sudden distress, "what shall I do then alone in this house, with that old tyrant Désirée?"

Nathalie gave her an indignant look, which fell harmlessly on the blind aunt of Rose.

From that time the young girl watched her sister with a degree of sorrowful interest which partly made her forget the other feelings of her heart. Whether Rose was conscious of her state or not, Nathalie

could not tell; she looked more thoughtful than was her wont, and there was an increase of gentleness in her manner, but when her aunt, in a sudden fit of affection, or rather fear, offered to send for a doctor, she merely replied: "It is useless," and it was hard to tell whether she spoke thus from the feeling that there was no actual danger, or from the knowledge that the time for warding off danger was already passed. Nathalie did not long remain in doubt on this point. On a dull autumn day, with a cheerless grey sky, that made the dark room where they sat alone working together, seem more dreary and comfortless than of wont, Rose suddenly addressed her sister, who looked, as she had too often looked of late, pale and sad.

"Nathalie," she said, laying down her work to look at her sister, "I had hoped better things of you; at first you struggled more courageously."

Nathalie, startled at the abruptness of this address —for there was one subject on which they never spoke—looked up uneasily and did not answer. Rose continued:

"Adversity has taught you in vain. Oh! foolish child, in what book did you ever read that happiness was the end of life, and girlish love the idol of a woman's heart?"

"In none," slowly answered Nathalie.

"And yet you act as if you had not only read this, but seen it. Every useless feeling is guilty, and be it

love or resentment that now fills your heart, it is your duty to tear it hence."

"Rose! Rose!" almost passionately exclaimed Nathalie, "it is you that talk as they talk in books, coldly and dispassionately. May I not ask how you should decide on this, you who have never loved?"

"True, I have not," replied Rose; "but may I not have imagined what love could be?"

"You!" cried Nathalie, looking up. She saw a faint blush mantling her sister's pale cheeks, and her eyes fast filling with tears.

"Did you think then," said Rose, with deep and sudden sadness, "that because I was plain and unlovely, I could not dream of what love might be? Did you think then that because I seemed reasonable and calm, I had not a woman's heart?"

Nathalie was too much surprised to reply.

"Nathalie," continued her sister, after a pause, "I do not think I have very long to live. I believe you know it. I have at least noticed the watchful and uneasy glance which you have often fastened on me of late. Before I leave you, let me beseech you once more to rule your heart and its feelings. Life is brief; bear it in a noble and courageous spirit. I will not say, take example from me, because our positions have been essentially different; but I will say, hear me, and learn that every heart has its own sorrows. No doubt you, like every one, think me cold; whatever I may be, cold I am not; but youth

is the key that unlocks after-life, and mine was very cheerless. Yet I too, calm as I seem now, have had my dreams, and dreams which would make the wildest romance I ever read seem poor and tame."

"I thought you did not read romances," said Nathalie, more astonished than ever.

"Not within your remembrance, I dare say; but years ago, when I was young, I read many; for then I lived in a land of unreality, of which they formed a part. No one ever suspected it; I was called apathetic, and reproved as cold. This was the misfortune of my life; I could not make myself understood. I felt it, and sought to undeceive no one. Who would have believed one so pale, so plain, so inexpressive in person and feature, had a heart to feel? You know how my youth was spent in this house with my aunt. Her temper has always been what it is. She so effectually checked everything like a free and happy feeling, that in the end reserve became a habit, through which I could not break. My most acute sensations have never betrayed themselves externally, and when I have suffered, I have suffered doubly. But, at the time of which I speak, I was happy in my heart's imaginings. All around me was harsh, stern, and displeasing; but I made myself a home and world of my own, wherein I moved and had my real being; where many loved me as I have never been loved, and greeted me with kind voices such as I never heard. Towards these imaginary beings I turned all the vague yearnings of

my heart; but, alas! that heart, human-like, would not be thus deceived; it longed for truth; my soul soon sickened at the emptiness of its own creations; it turned away from them with bitterness and grief. Yet there were days when, repelled by everything outward, I came back penitent and weary to my visionary home; when I recalled once more the ideal beings I had loved of yore; when I held myself blessed, though it were but for an hour, to quench my longing thirst at that fount of deceiving waters. This sounds strange, Nathalie, and yet you hear in mine the history of many a human heart. But there is a difference between my destiny and that of others, at least amongst those I have known. If they dreamed like me, they saw their dreams either broken or fulfilled; they drank from the cup of knowledge full draughts of bitterness or bliss; they passed the threshold of life and trod along its lovely or its rugged paths; and whether they were blest or doomed, they at least accomplished their destiny. But with me it was not thus. I was haunted by visions which tortured me because it would never be in my power to test either their hollowness or truth. The knowledge, the actual experience, for which I thirsted so ardently was denied me for ever. Others passed on before me and engaged in the strife of existence; I sat an exile at the door, passive, listless, and unheeded. I could not be said to live; I glided down the stream of life without more power to direct my course than the barque which is sent adrift. No

one seemed to wonder at this. Young girls came and told me their secrets, and let me understand it was because they saw I had no secrets of my own. They were right; I had no such secrets; I was excluded from existence. I sometimes asked myself if it would be always thus? I knew that it would, and my heart sank from this fate; from the cheerless relative who was my only stay, and the gloomy dwelling my only home. You complain, Nathalie, but I tell you that a sorrow, a real sorrow, would have been bliss to me, for to suffer would have been to live. I grew sick at heart and longed for death. I was not very devout in those days and thought not, as I think now, of the Christian's immortality. Death then seemed a mournful and Lethe-like repose, a divine and lovely mystery; I looked not beyond that untroubled sleep in the cool bosom of the green earth beneath the blue sky. I prayed to die with the same ardent prayers I had once put forth for happiness and earthly love. I did not say to the Almighty: 'Take my life,' but I yearned for repose; and every passionate wish, whether embodied in words or not, is still the heart's truest, deepest prayer."

She paused. Nathalie, leaning back in her chair, with her hands clasped upon her knees, was looking sad and amazed at all she heard.

"You would not have thought this of me," said Rose, with a mournful smile, "of me, your calm, apathetic sister; nor am I now what I was then. I

speak of feelings that have long and wholly vanished. Sorrow works its own cure. No human heart was ever framed for ceaseless repining. Mine left me; I remember the day and the hour. I sat alone in this room, near this window; it was evening, day faded fast, and a few pale stars shone from the depths of the blue sky above the abbey. My heart was very full. I knelt down and prayed in broken and inarticulate ejaculations. 'Why am I alone?—Why does nothing care for me?—Others are loved—why am I not?—Oh! God, since I am useless in this world—since woman's destiny is denied me—have mercy on me—let me die.' My tears flowed fast and I sought not to check them. I know not what day it was—some saint's festival, I suppose, for as I wept, the old coloured church-window before me was lit up with the mellow light of many lamps within, doubtless for some evening service, and the organ pealed forth with a solemn strain, and soft voices, blending in religious harmony, rose sweet and clear in the silence of evening. My rebellious heart melted within me. I remembered a sermon I had heard as a child on the text of 'Take up your cross and follow me.' A dim revelation of the truth came to my pining spirit; I saw and felt my sin; I confessed it before God. It was not my fate that was grievous, it was I who was weak and shrinking. My destiny was that of thousands: they suffered patiently; I asked to die. I had erred greatly; I had considered happiness the end of life; it is not, nor

is suffering; those who say so blaspheme the goodness of God who has been prodigal of all joyful gifts. Yet there is much of sorrow here below, and were all pure bliss, man would still find vexation and trouble in his own unquiet heart. The end of life is duty. We all hear this, but we never know it until the truth is reached through tears and sorrow. Oh! why may not one bitter experience do for all? Why must humanity age after age be learning over again the same bitter and never-known lesson? From that time I entered on a new existence. I consecrated myself to the endurance of my lonely fate with a severe and holy joy. The cup was bitter still, but I now quaffed it with a fixed and upward look. When I saw other women happy wives and blessed mothers, when I remembered my own solitude with a pang I could not always repress, I tore the envious feelings from my heart and laid them prostrate at my feet; and I learned that thus to subdue and triumph was to live."

There was a brief silence.

"*Mon Dieu!*" at length said Nathalie, "is it all true? You astonish me greatly, Rose. I could not have thought you felt such things. Did your trouble go away so readily? Did you suffer and repine no more?"

It was some time before Rose answered.

"No," she at length replied, "I cannot deceive you, Nathalie; no, my trouble did not go thus away, and I did not at once cease to repine or teach my

heart to submit. Resignation is a slow journeyer, but a long abiding guest. She visited me late; for I confess to you that one longing was at first only replaced by another. The object had changed, but I was still pursued by the same desire for real practical life. I am no mystic; mere religious feeling could never content me. It is good to sit like Mary at the feet of the Lord, but I had more of the spirit of Martha in me. Oh! that I had only been born in times of peril and strife; in the days of the early Church, and of the triumphant martyrs. It is hard to submit to a quiet, obscure, and apparently useless life; and yet this I had to do. It had pleased Providence to give me to perform those homely duties for which the world has no flattering voice, and of which no records are kept. To stay near this harsh aunt who daily reproached me for the bread I eat, and yet who wanted me, was my duty; I resolved that it should also be my sanctification and sacrifice. Nathalie, is your religious faith spiritual, is it more than mere form? If it is, know that you can never be all unhappy; that there is no destiny so miserable, but faith can soothe and purify; none so mean but it may raise and ennoble to the dignity of the holiest martyrdom."

She ceased, and the faint flush of her cheek, the transient light in her eyes, showed the secret enthusiasm of her nature. Nathalie was astonished and still more moved.

"I respect, I admire you," she said, "I

understand you for the first time. But no, I do not understand you. Why, you have been as great a dreamer as ever I was, and yet you were so severe for my slightest fancies."

"Because I knew to what they led," replied Rose, looking up; "besides, it was a habit I had taken, and I was not merely severe to you; I was as much so to myself. Long before we met, I had adopted as a cure for all my follies a strange remedy. I had decreed that I should be my own judge, and that from my own lips should fall the sentence of my condemnation. Thus I made it a rule to deride and stigmatize the folly of my heart. I found a cruel pleasure in destroying my own illusions one by one; in seeing them fade before my cold, reasoning arguments, as the last flowers of the year before the breath of winter. Nathalie, be wise,—check your dreams in time; wait not until the re-action arrives; wait not to know the bitter joy of being your own most cherished hopes' destroyer."

"Oh! Rose," involuntarily exclaimed Nathalie, "is there not something very dreadful in this suicide of the heart?"

"Sad, but not dreadful," said Rose, with a compassionate glance, "it is a suicide which one outlives, my poor child, and to show you this, it is, that I have said so much, and recalled feelings that are now for me like dim shadows of the past. May you too thus struggle and win."

Nathalie looked at her sister as she once more bent

over her task; she thought of the living death she had endured for years; her heart failed her at the prospect of such a dismal victory, and an irrepressible voice exclaimed within her in answer to the wish of Rose:

"Nay, God forbid!"

CHAPTER VII.

Autumn had come, and Nathalie was still the guest of Madame Lavigne. Rose was now so weak that even her aunt perceived it was necessary for the young girl to stay, and she was the first to say :—

"Nathalie, you must not go."

A doctor had been called in, but he declared it was an hereditary, and therefore hopeless, case. He had attended the mother of Rose, and he said to Madame Lavigne, in the presence of Nathalie and Désirée :—

"She will die like your sister, quietly, and without much pain. She is too weak to suffer."

Madame Lavigne heard him with a sort of apathetic terror. She thought how lonely the house would be when her patient niece was gone; and what would become of her, when she was left blind and helpless, at the mercy of the tyrannic Désirée.

The old servant listened, and said not a word, but

for the whole of that day her face was troubled and very sad.

Nathalie was also present. She heard the doctor's sentence with a sickening heart. She had always loved her sister, but never so much as since the time of her own sorrows, for grief has a strange power in binding us to other hearts. Of late, too, since they had lived beneath the same roof, since they had spoken together in closer communion of spirit, her attachment had deepened. A change had also taken place in Rose with regard to Nathalie; her look rested more kindly upon her; her voice took gentler tones when she addressed her; the coldness and severity in her character, which had so often repelled the young girl, now seemed to fade away gradually before the approach of death, like the harsher features of a landscape, which are subdued into softness and harmony by the shades of evening.

A few days before her end they sat together in their little room, where Rose had of late remained almost exclusively. It was a calm autumn evening, full of serenity and repose. The tower of the old abbey rose in dark and distinct outlines on the blue sky; the colony of rooks cawed and wheeled round it in circling flight, before they settled down to their night's rest. Beyond the abbey extended the abandoned cloisters, and the lonely churchyard, with low grey tomb-stones sunk into the earth, and a few dark cypresses, rising tall and motionless, in the stillness of evening. The sun had set, but a rosy

flush still lingered in the west, blending softly with shades of vapoury grey, which melted in their turn into the deepening blue of the upper sky.

"It will be fine to-morrow," said Rose.

She was leaning back in her chair, which faced the window. Her look was fastened on the sky; her countenance was calm. Nathalie sat near her, looking at her sister, and holding one of her hands within her own.

"How do you know it will be fine to-morrow?" she asked.

"Look at those red streaks in the sky. Besides, the air is so clear and still. Listen, and you will hear the lowing of the distant cattle. How faint it sounds? The herds are coming back from pasture. Yes, it will surely be fine to-morrow."

The heart of Nathalie grew sad within her. She had seldom or ever heard her sister allude to the beauties of nature before her illness, but since then, the dying girl seemed to love such themes. The freshness of the summer mornings, the warmth and life of fervid noonday, the fading loveliness of eve, were for ever haunting her sick bed. Although Rose knew well her state, and never expressed the least regret for life, Nathalie sometimes feared her sister was not quite so resigned, as she had first thought her to be. When Rose spoke thus of what would so soon be lost to her for ever, the young girl gently endeavoured to divert her thoughts. She now observed:—

"Madame Lavigne wishes to know whether there is anything you would like to-night?"

"She is very kind, but I wish for nothing. Look at that large, brilliant star, Nathalie. Does it not seem to rise slowly before us, as if it knew of its own beauty? Is there not something of the spirit of life in its light, so tremulous and yet so clear?"

"It is very beautiful," answered Nathalie; "but I fear you will take cold, Rose." She rose to close the window as she spoke.

"Do not," replied Rose, arresting her with her pale thin hand; "there is no chillness in the air, and the sight of all this beauty does me good."

Nathalie resumed her seat. There was a brief silence.

"You may close the window now," at length said Rose.

"The room is almost dark; shall I get a light?"

"Not yet. My poor aunt being blind herself, cannot endure others to have light burning. I do not wish to vex her for the little while I have yet to live."

Nathalie turned her head away.

"Oh! Rose," she said, at length, "why speak thus? You cannot know."

"But you do know," gravely replied Rose, "and knowing, should not seek to deceive me."

Nathalie did not answer. Her sister continued, "You see that I am well aware of everything; we can therefore talk quite frankly; and there is a

question I have long wished to ask you: what will you do when I am gone?"

"God knows," answered Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Will you stay here with my poor aunt, who has so great a horror of being left alone with Désirée?"

Nathalie shook her head.

"You will not," pursued Rose, "and I cannot blame you; it were, indeed, a living death. But what will you do, my poor child?"

"Trust to Providence."

There was a pause.

"It is strange," at length said Rose, "but it seems to me as if you did not speak with your usual frankness. Answer me truly—have you any plan settled in your own mind?"

She bent forward as she spoke, to look at her sister, whose troubled and averted look confirmed her suspicion.

"What is it, Nathalie?" she gravely asked.

"You talk of settled plan—I have none, Rose, but when Mademoiselle Dantin called the other day, she asked me if I would return to her school after the vacation."

"Did you consent?"

"No, I did not."

"But you wish for it. Why so?"

"It is as good a place as another, and she has offered me an increase of salary."

Rose looked at her fixedly.

"And these," she said at length, "these are

your motives for going back to that school, so near that house which was once to have been yours? Oh, Nathalie! do you think me blind? Do you think me unable to read your heart and its enduring resentment. Oh! you are indeed a true daughter of the south—proud and vindictive."

A flush rose to Nathalie's brow.

"Yes, Rose," she said, with subdued vehemence, "you speak truly; I feel it is my mother's southern blood, and hers only, that flows in my veins. And in the south, if we know how to love, we also know how to hate. He once said I had energy enough for the feeling. I will show him he was a prophet. He said he would be years away, do not believe it, Rose: do not believe it. He will return soon, perchance; soon enough, at least, for my purpose. He shall see me the dependant of a tyrannical mistress, and he shall say to himself that he might have spared me that fate, for which I care not, but which, if what his aunt has told me be true, it will grieve and torment him to see. We cannot be so near without meeting; I shall neither seek nor avoid it, but I know that it will be so. He took one last look when we parted; I was pale and sorrow-stricken, then; but I am not so now; pride has come to my aid, and when we meet again, there will be enough left for regret, in the beauty that once pleased his eye. He will suffer, I know he will; let him; I, too, have suffered. He will feel that though thus ever near, we are for ever separated; let him; I, too, have felt

it. There will arise in his heart a ceaseless regret for something lost; an unavailing wish that the past might be effaced. Let the regret and desire rise; I, too, have known them."

Her brow was knit, her look fixed, her lips were firmly compressed, and for a while her pale face lit up with something of the deadly beauty given to the Medusa.

"You see, Rose," she resumed, more calmly, "that I am, as you say, vindictive; but mine is the passive vengeance of mere feeling."

"What becomes of your vengeance, if he is indifferent and cold?" asked Rose.

"He cannot, he cannot," vehemently replied the young girl; "he cannot be so. Indifferent! I defy him."

"And if he repents; if he asks you to forgive the past?"

"He will not do so, Rose; but if he did, I should refuse him, as inexorably as ever he uttered refusal."

Rose looked at her with gentle seriousness.

"My poor child," she said, "can you indeed hold those feelings, whilst living, as you do, in the very sight and presence of death. Look at me; think of what I am, of what I shall be ere long, and confess that the feelings of your heart belong to the perishable, not to the divine, part of your nature. You have received your sorrow as a curse, and it was sent only as a chastening trial."

"Oh! Rose, give me your faith," sadly replied

Nathalie, "and I will forswear my feelings, and confess that my fate is just. But how can I, when I see you so good, so meek, so noble, condemned from childhood to passive sufferings? I was rebellious, but you, Rose, needed no trial. What has your wasted youth led to?"

Rose laid her hand lightly on her sister's arm.

"Nathalie," she said very earnestly, "know this: none, no, none have ever suffered in vain. The silent tears which the lonely night beheld, were not in vain; the inward, and still unknown strife, was not in vain; not even the dreams of my youth, or the sorrows of your love have been vain. We are linked to one another, here, below, by a chain so fine, that mortal eye can never see it; so strong, that mortal strength can never break it. If the sorrow we have known has given us a more kindly feeling towards the suffering; if it has only drawn forth one gentle word more, can it be said to have been in vain?"

"Oh! Rose," gloomily said Nathalie, "life is more than a duty, at that rate; it is an eternal sacrifice."

"And why not?" asked Rose, with a kindly look; "why not? Yes, a sacrifice. There are many paths; the goal is one. Some—they are happy—are called upon to struggle for truth and right, in the sight of God and man; to endure the weariness, the burning heat of the noonday sun, until the evening's well-earned rest is won at length. Oh! great and glorious is their fate—a fate angels might envy. Others, less known, less tried, more happy, according to human

weakness, accomplish humble duties, and follow only the cool, shady paths of life. They toil and suffer, too, but the pure halo of a divine peace is around them still. To a third class, whom the Almighty knows as less gifted to act, less fit to soothe the woes and cares of others, another fate is given. Theirs," she added, and her voice grew tremulous and low, "is to pass through life in the vain longing for doing better things; in stagnant quietness when the soul's passion is action; their sacrifice is that of will, and they, too, have their reward, and enter at last into the end and consummation of all things—God."

But though the soul of Rose, long purified by faith, could rise thus high, that of Nathalie, darkened by earthly shadows, could not follow.

"And is this," she asked, looking at her sister, "the reward promised to virtue?"

"And why should virtue seek a reward?" returned the inexorable Rose. "Above all, why should it hope for what was never promised—an earthly reward? Who first invented that sinful lie? Crosses, sorrows, and untold agonies of spirit, these are its proper rewards; let it seek none other. But you look half-terrified. My child, do not misunderstand me. All is not misery: there is joy in the brave endurance of sorrow; there is happiness in adoration, not in the cold lip-worship, but in the fervent adoration of the silent heart; and there is a divine peace in prayer. For what is prayer? Communion with God and humanity: with the great Being whose

infinitude is beyond mortal comprehension; with the frail finite creatures who suffer here below in their narrow space. I can see you pity me; but when I have known all these feelings, is it possible I should think myself quite unhappy?"

"Do you regret life?" asked Nathalie.

"No; that were difficult," replied Rose, with a touch of sadness; "nature is weak, and according to her, I have not been quite happy. But my sorrows have led to this much good: that though I am young and see the light of life fading from me fast, I fear not death? Can the solitary lamp which burned unheeded through the long and weary night, see with terror the dawn which tells the coming of a purer day. We hear of the shadow of the valley of death; we should hear of the shadow of the valley of life; for life is indeed a gloomy valley, full of doubt, and still shrouded in dark mists. We descend into it we know not how; obscurity and dismay beset the path we must tread; we journey we know not whither, unless through faith; but as we ascend, the air becomes more pure, the sky more clear; and when we stand on the crowning rock, light reigns above, and darkness at our feet."

She spoke with fervent earnestness.

"I envy you your living faith," said Nathalie, eyeing her mournfully; "I am not happy, I feel as if I should never again be happy in this life; but I would not leave the dark valley yet, and my whole soul would sink with terror at the prospect of death."

"But you shall not die yet, my poor child," affectionately said Rose, turning towards her sister with a faint smile; "it is natural for you to feel thus. The flesh is weak in youth. Faith comes with sorrowing years, and when we leave its early hours behind us, life grows less dear. Oh! why at any age is death made so very awful? Why were the scythe, the skeleton, the grim visage, given as attributes to this gentle deliverer? I would have him an angel, calm, pitying and sad, but beautiful, and no king of terrors. A deliverer he is, for does he not sever the subtle yet heavy chain which links the spirit to the flesh, life to clay? Nathalie, do you remember that passage in the service of the Mass, when, after the Hosanna has been sung, the choir raise their voices and sing: Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini—"Blessed be he who cometh in the name of the Lord." From my earliest years these words produced a strange impression on me. As a child I wondered what glorious messenger from heaven was thus solemnly greeted by those of earth. I thought of winged angels visiting patriarchs of the desert; of spirits in white robes with diadems made of the eternal stars. Oh, Nathalie! even such a pure messenger is death to me now. He comes, the bearer of glorious tidings, the herald of the Eternal, and I too say, 'Blessed be he who cometh in the name of the Lord.'"

Rose bowed her head and uttered the last words in a low tone, as if it were something inward, and

not mere external sense, that spoke within her. The moon had risen from behind the abbey-tower, and now threw its pale ray on her calm features and bending profile. As she sat there, in an attitude of monumental stillness, Nathalie gazed on her with an awe which is not that we feel for the dying or the dead. Rose belonged to neither; the barque was not yet bearing her away over that dark flood which leads to the better land; but she stood on the very brink of the breaking waves, and her clear glance seemed already to behold the unknown shore beyond. It was this awed Nathalie. To her that other world of which Rose spoke so calmly, was shrouded in mists. She believed, but human faith is weak, and she had too long made her home among the dreams and hopes of earth, not to dread bidding them a last farewell.

Three days after this Rose died.

It was a calm twilight; she had laid down on her bed to rest awhile; Nathalie sat at the foot of her couch; an unconquerable sadness had been over her since the morning, when Rose had given a strange lingering look at the rising sun, and then turned away with something like sudden pain. Towards evening Nathalie had said to her:

"Do look at that beautiful sunset."

"No," replied her sister, in a low tone, "it is better not," and she steadily kept her look averted until the last golden gleam had faded away from the walls of the little room. Then she turned and looked

at the grey sky, and smiled—perchance at this last victory. It was soon after this that she lay down; she felt drowsy, she said, and wearied, sleep would do her good. She spoke for a few minutes more to her sister, then slowly fell asleep. She woke no more, and Nathalie never knew at what moment, whilst she watched there by her sister, sleep had ceased, and death begun.

"She is sleeping," whispered Désirée, when Nathalie, at length alarmed, called her up; "she was always quiet—very quiet, Mademoiselle Nathalie; one never heard her about the place, she is a very quiet girl."

But when she saw what sort of a repose had fallen on the quiet Rose, she hid her face in her hands, and wept by that bed of death.

Like a shadow Rose had moved through life, and like a shadow she noiselessly passed away from it when her time was come.

Nathalie had not expected to hear this event announced, but neither had she anticipated the strange, heart-sickening melancholy which now took possession of her.

The degrees of sorrow are many, but all lead to the same bourne by the same beaten path. To have suffered once is to suffer for ever; the faculty, like thought, is varied and infinite; let it change as it will, it dies not, unless with our being. Once struck, that mournful chord vibrates unceasingly in the human heart, until hushed and

snapped asunder by death. It may seem lulled to silence, but listen, and you will hear its distant murmurs low and deep, like the sullen voice of many waters. It is the stream, which once let loose, may not cease to flow, the mournful lament which, once awakened, is to sleep no more.

In our first sorrow we know not this. We mourn over a faded hope, as over the wreck of a whole existence; we defy future grief; all is absorbed by the one poignant pain of the present. But when the second sorrow has come, why does it not rest until the first is roused and awakened? Is there between the many griefs of man a link of mysterious brotherhood? Are they kindred, children of the same parent, watchers in the same mournful vigil, doomed to call one another throughout the whole weary night, and to break for ever the longing soul's repose? It would seem so. Time appeared to heal the wound; it only hid the shaft, it only buried the poisoned sting still farther in the depths of the aching heart. See how living is the pain you thought gone, dead and buried! Like Lazarus, it slept; behold it now, breaking the bonds and cerements of the grave, and rising from its ghastly shroud into sudden resurrection and awful life! It comes as you saw it last when you deemed it dead, with its train of hopes sere and withered, like falling autumn leaves, with its unutterable agony of spirit, with all the bitterness of its last parting pangs. It comes to sicken and appal with

the vision of former years, bright and blooming once, pale and dreary now. It is not that the sorrow is suffered over again in all its anguish, or that the cup is quaffed once more in all its bitterness; but the dull, undying pain is often worse than the sharp pang that gave it birth; the dregs are more bitter than the full cup of grief, some sorrows are better endured than remembered; better by far the strife, the exquisite agony of passion than the heart-sickening memory of its wreck and ruin.

Nathalie found it so. She had felt the loss of her parents with the brief acuteness of childhood's grief; but her love had been her first real sorrow; she had not, however, suffered incessantly—who does?—there had been moments of ease, almost of happiness, when she either forgot or hoped vaguely, but the death of Rose awoke her grief in all its first passionate strength. Yet what affinity was there between the two sorrows? Why did the shadow of her unhappy love darken the peace of that death-bed? She had thought the last sorrow could kill the first; she now found they went hand in hand, and gave each other new strength. Love is life; it shrinks from death with terror and dismay, and if Nathalie was unhappy, she had not yet reached the depth of despair which welcomes the thought of annihilation. She believed in immortality, but with the dim, imperfect faith of a heart whose divinity is of earth. She stood alone on a shore dreary and barren, but she remembered the

green valleys through which she had passed; she hoped to return there again, and she shrank from the dark sea which led to the better land, for death to her, ay, even a calm death, like that of Rose, was inexpressibly awful.

Her heart was perhaps chastened, but it was also wrung and dismayed. What was human love when the destinies of the beings who loved were so brief? Could the illness of a few weeks and a sharp pang be the end of a feeling that had seemed eternal? Did love die with life? or did the sacred flame burn on even when the mortal shrine which had been its home was broken and decayed, mere dust and ashes? She knew not, and it was because she doubted, that her heart sank within her; and this doubt, ere long, became the most bitter and tormenting part of her grief. For grief is of a complex nature; it is no simple regret for a certain good denied. That is the feeling of the childlike and the ignorant; that was the sorrow of the ancients—earnest and deep—but not the sorrow of modern times. We pay the penalty of feelings more refined, and therefore more easily wounded. That vague weariness of spirit which leads to suicide, was to them an unknown thing. They knew love with passion, jealousy, despair, and desire; but with them love was only love, no more. They had passions, not feelings; ardent wishes and no vague hopes. They loved or hated life, but never wearied of it without cause. The lover might die of grief, but the grief was simple,

natural, and true. This was because they lived in a comparative state of youth and innocence, not that innocence implying the absence of what we term sin, but that which means a simple observance of nature's laws and feelings. When the ancients lost that childlike simplicity, they perished in art, poetry, character, and power. They were the infancy of humanity, immortal, glorious children, sublime in their way, but children still, for to them the real, the actual, was everything. The spirituality, the idealism of modern times would have been to them as an unknown tongue. They never could have understood us, but we understand them, because we have all more or less passed through that phase of life, which to them was all existence.

Whether for good or ill we at least are different. One sorrow seems to wed us to all the sorrows of humanity. There is a secret link between even the disappointments of the heart, and the disappointments of the social strife called life. To women and their altered position is owing this vague and almost querulous sorrow. They are the living embodiment of the most heavy social wrongs, and their secret discontent swells the voice of general murmur.

Nathalie was of no metaphysical turn. She felt acutely without seeking to analyze her feelings. She had that genial southern nature which rejoices in the sunshine, but which also droops in the shade. She longed for happiness; she knew not how to suffer patiently. She was young, beautiful, warm-

hearted, and she felt that her fate was hard. She submitted, but without resignation. At the same time she neither sought nor wished to forget. Instinct, far more than reason, told her that her love had become a portion of her being, and that should she ever cast it away from her, she would never be again what she once had been. The slave may break his chain, but cannot efface the mark of the burning brand. To drink of Lethe's oblivion is not to be renovated in all the purity and divine freshness of youth. Nathalie felt this, and she preferred the draught of bitter but living water, to the chill of that death-like cup. Her love to her was her life; she shrank with terror from the thought that it could die; that she had welcomed no glorious and immortal guest, but the frail, perishable sojourner of a day; a thing made of clay, food for the grave.

When Rose had once told her that her sorrow would soon pass away, she had felt the deep, unutterable desolation of spirit of the worshipper whose idol is laid low and who sees the sanctuary stripped and bare. She called her sister cruel in her heart; she felt as she felt once in reading that awful dream of the German poet, to whom a voice cried out from the depths of the deep, "There is no God." She rejected this mournful atheism; she clung to her faith with all the fervent adoration of youth; to think that she could forget, be happy, and love again, was to her no consolation, but a source of most

desolating grief; for it said that love was no god, but an idol.

She resolved in her pride that with her at least it should not be so; that the feelings which had made her suffer so keenly, should be kept pure and unsullied; that it should last as long as life and be as a portion of her being; that time might fade the bloom on her cheek and whiten the dark hair on her brow, but that over her heart and its feelings it should have no power. She had heard that age had the fatal gift of chilling the warm blood of youth, that years could weaken the most impassioned feelings, that death triumphed over love; but she scorned the belief, she cast it from her with all the romantic disdain of her years. For, though her worship might be misplaced, she too was religious.

CHAPTER IX.

Notwithstanding the entreaties of Madame Lavigne that she would stay with her, Nathalie returned to the establishment of Mademoiselle Dantin a few weeks after the death of Rose.

She had been a year away, and three teachers had replaced her and failed in conciliating the favour of the severe schoolmistress. One objected to having her letters opened, and left in consequence; a second was dismissed as too quiet; and a third for having failed in the respect due to Mademoiselle Dantin, who thus learned practically, that impatient as Nathalie was, she was upon the whole more forbearing than her successors. She asked her to return, scarcely hoping that she would do so, and was equally pleased and surprised at the ready consent of the young girl—a consent of which it is scarcely necessary to say, she never suspected the real motive.

At first the Chevalier felt delighted at the return of "his southern flower;" but, alas! a change had come over the blossom: it was not blighted, but chilled by the cold northern breeze of silent sorrow, The Chevalier soon perceived with dismay that Nathalie no longer cared for her knight. His admiration and old-fashioned gallantry wearied her. She thought him very kind, no doubt, but rather foolish, and was in no mood to humour him as of yore. Mademoiselle Dantin, who had always been a little jealous, approved of this change. Indeed Nathalie daily rose in her good opinion; she condescended to subdue the manifestations of her temper in her favour. To what she still had to endure, Nathalie felt perfectly indifferent. Grief is a good armour against the arrows of slights and sharp words. This apathetic spirit of patience had at first provoked Mademoiselle Dantin. She saw in it the result of a deeply laid scheme to insult her, and hinted as much to Nathalie, who only shrugged her shoulders in reply. Mademoiselle Dantin soon recognized her mistake; she also saw that Nathalie was wholly altered, and that the mischief was beyond remedy. The piquant quarrels which had shed so agreeable a variety over her former existence, were gone for ever. Her only consolation under this trying dispensation was, that by once more availing herself of the services of her former teacher, she had obtained a sudden and very unexpected influence at the château.

The Canoness having totally failed in inducing

Nathalie to come and live with her after the death of Rose, had at first been greatly hurt and offended. But gradually her anger cooled, aud with her usual kindness she resolved to do all she could to alleviate the young girl's position. She began by sending her flowers, at which the schoolmistress sneered; then a basket of fruit came directed to Mademoiselle Dantin, who condescended to accept it, and finally Madame la Chanoinesse Radegonde de Sainville requested the pleasure of Mademoiselle Dantin's company one Sunday evening, which pleasure the schoolmistress very readily granted. Outwardly she appeared very little flattered by these attentions and advances; but her inward self-congratulations were great. Few things could have pleased her more than to be a guest at the great house, and to sit stiffly in a high-backed chair facing the little Canoness, over whom, after a month's acquaintance, she tyrannized to her heart's content. In exchange for the pleasure she thus received, she showed herself very willing to relieve Nathalie as much as possible from the duties imposed upon her; for though she would not on any account have confessed it, Mademoiselle Dantin perfectly understood the motives which had induced the Canoness to seek her acquaintance.

But Nathalie obstinately refused to avail herself of the schoolmistress's leniency. She felt secretly irritated at the well-meant efforts of the Canoness, which only increased the fever they were meant to

soothe. The flowers only reminded her of a lost and happy time; she would not grieve Aunt Radegonde by a refusal, but she gave them to the children without so much as bestowing a glance upon them. The fruit which came from the place of which she was once to have been mistress, she would not touch, and nothing could induce her to avail herself of the relaxation of toil the Canoness had ingeniously obtained for her from Mademoiselle Dantin. She had come to the school to lead a life of privation and suffering, and suffer she would. She was up early and toiled late; her dress had never been more rigidly simple; the Canoness wished to make her a few presents, Nathalie persisted in declining them.

"But, Petite, I am tired of seeing you always in that brown dress," once said Aunt Radegonde, with slight impatience.

"That brown dress is, however, exactly suited to Mademoiselle Dantin's teacher," replied Nathalie, with great pride.

"Oh! if you were his wife," involuntarily exclaimed the Canoness, "what would he have thought too costly or too rare for you?"

"Never speak so, never," cried Nathalie, almost angrily.

"Very well, Petite," meekly replied Aunt Radegond, but it was a subject that ever recurred between them.

Of the indulgences offered by Mademoiselle Dantin, that of visiting her old friend was the only

one Nathalie had accepted. She did not come often, and seldom unless in the evening, when school was over. It is true that Aunt Radegonde had begged hard for those visits, but it cannot be denied that not merely to please her had Nathalie complied; it gave her a tormenting sort of pleasure to sit where she had sat so often; see every place and object she knew so well; to brood over the past so full, delightful, and rapid, and compare it to the slow, dreary, present, and blank future of her lot. Yet it was not every spot she could thus venture to behold again. Aunt Radegonde once sent her to the library for a book; it was a grey winter twilight; and as Nathalie opened the door and entered, there was something so chill and desolate in the aspect of that solitary room, with its shadowy light, blank fireplace, unread books, vacant table, and unoccupied chair, that she turned away with a sickening heart, and ever afterwards shunned the place. Thus, in the routine of her old existence, in dreams of the past and silent endurance of the present, was the greater portion of the winter spent by Nathalie.

Contrary to the prediction the young girl had made when speaking to Rose, Monsieur de Sainville did not return. He was travelling over the south of Europe, and wrote occasionally to his aunt, who regularly read his letters to Nathalie. In the first, he spoke kindly and affectionately of the young girl, but latterly he ceased to mention her name; and as his wanderings extended further, his letters became

more rare, and every time more brief. At length, he remained two months without writing, or giving his aunt any clue to his place of sojourn.

On a chill February morning, Nathalie was suddenly summoned from her class to the room of Mademoiselle Dantin, who was confined to her bed by an attack of rheumatism, caught by watching the previous evening in the garden, in order to ascertain that one of the servants had not introduced some strange man within these sacred precincts. She averred having heard the intruder clambering away over the wall, and the satisfaction of not having been mistaken in her conjectures somewhat consoled her for the otherwise unpleasant result of her vigil. Nathalie found her buried under a heap of blankets: the tip of her sharp nose just emerging from beneath the bed-clothes.

"You want to speak to me, madame," said Nathalie, without sitting down.

"Yes, my dear child,"—Madame Dantin had become very affectionate of late,—"I want to speak to you; but pray be seated."

Nathalie complied, silently.

Mademoiselle Dantin coughed, by way of opening the conversation.

"You are aware," she observed at length, "that it has long been my intention to retire from the scholastic life?"

"Yes, madame, I am aware of it."

"Well, I do not mind informing you that I

believe the moment to do so has finally arrived. Of course I am not going to let so prosperous an establishment as the only school in Sainville—my rivals have always failed, and gone away deeply in debt—go, as it were, for nothing. In justice to my pupils, I feel I must not do so. Madame Ledru, a lady of Rouen, has accordingly opened negotiations with me on that important subject. The negotiations have been progressing for the last three months, unfavourably at first, I confess, but very satisfactory of late. Madame Ledru was rather inclined towards what I may call the Talleyrand school of diplomacy, but I so plainly showed her that finessing and soft words were alike lost upon me, that she has frankly confessed herself conquered. In short, we are as near agreeing as we shall probably ever be. I need not say my first stipulation was, that all the teachers should be retained in their present employ."

Nathalie bent her head in silent acquiescence. She felt perfectly indifferent to the contemplated change.

"This is not all," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, after a slight pause. "Madame Ledru, after objecting to the purchase of this house and its adjacent garden, has nevertheless agreed to take them both at my very moderate valuation. I must confess that Madame Ledru was rather reluctant to do so at first, that she attempted to evade the point, but I was so resolute that she gave it up in despair, and offered me a certain sum if I would dispose of this house and garden to some other person; but I, conceiving that

her objections were futile and fantastic, held firmly, and accordingly carried the point."

Nathalie heard her with evident impatience.

"Madame," said she, listening, "I fear my pupils are taking advantage of my absence to neglect their studies."

"My dear child," sententiously replied the schoolmistress; "youth requires relaxation." This was so unusual a sentiment for Mademoiselle Dantin to utter, that Nathalie wondered whether rheumatism had any effect on the brain.

"But, madame——" she exclaimed.

"I know what I am saying," interrupted Mademoiselle Dantin. "Yes, Mademoiselle Montolieu, youth requires relaxation; an hour's idleness will do the pupils a wonderful deal of good. Besides," she philosophically added, "it is no use mincing the matter, I want you for that space of time, during which the pupils must manage as best they can without you."

Nathalie, who had risen, resumed her seat.

"Well, as I was saying," continued the schoolmistress, who liked, as she said, "a logical sequence," "I carried the point; but it does not follow that if I can oblige Madame Ledru I shall not do so. Far from it. The truth is, that a far more eligible opportunity of disposing of this house and garden has offered itself to me this very morning; an opportunity which, if I allow it to escape me now, may never return; and yet, how am I to avail myself of it—

I ask you that, Mademoiselle Montolieu,—with these dreadful rheumatic pains that do not leave me one moment's ease; but I heard the fellow scrambling over the broken glass on the top of the wall, which is always a sort of consolation:—I tried to get up a while ago, and I can assure you that it was as much as I could do to get in again. I have, however, great hopes in your talents for business, which, if they equal your other talents," she added, with a gracious smile, "cannot fail from accomplishing the desired object."

"My talents for business, madame!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Oh, it is so easy," coaxingly observed Mademoiselle Dantin; "and at the same time it will be excellent practice for you on some future occasion of your own; your marriage settlement, for instance; but with regard to this particular case you will allow me to give you a few instructions, suggested by my experience. In the first place, and as you are in a highly advantageous position, do not compromise it. Be careless, indifferent. 'Sell this house? Why, you do not care about selling it at all;' you are pressed; you yield; you are asked the price: 'Ten thousand francs.' The purchaser objects;—they always do. You point out that the house is large and convenient; that the garden is beautifully laid out; that the beech-tree is celebrated for its beauty, and that there is even a legend about it; that the poplars are fine;—in short,

it is a cheap concern at ten thousand. Well, the purchaser yields, and then you suddenly remember that you cannot sell the house at all; that it is promised to Madame Ledru; that she will be dreadfully disappointed; indeed, that no earthly sum will induce you to break your engagement to her."

"Oh, then there is to be no agreement after all!" very seriously said Nathalie, with something of her old spirit of mischief.

"No agreement!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin aghast. "Why, Mademoiselle Montolieu, what is all this diplomacy for, but to render the agreement more secure? No agreement? Ah! if you only had a little experience of such matters, you would know that a business negotiation is very like a marriage, never more sceure than when it is nearly broken off. But to resume. Nothing is, of course, to induce you to break your word to Madame Ledru; but you think it highly probable that for the moderate sum of one thousand francs, this lady may consent to wave her right. I believe I have been sufficiently explicit. I must trust the rest to your native tact, and knowledge of the purchaser's temper and peculiarities."

Nathalie looked up, suddenly roused.

"This may also serve to guide you," continued Mademoiselle Dantin, handing her an open letter as she spoke.

Nathalie rose and took it. She did not read the brief contents, but she saw the handwriting and

name, and she felt as if a mist fell on her eyes, and the floor shook beneath her feet.

"You see," continued the voice of Mademoiselle Dantin, "our neighbour is a close man of business. He has long wished for this property, which is indeed a portion of the old Sainville estate: I may even say that he has made some overtures to me on that subject, but I was not going to sell myself out for him, or indeed for anybody. Now, however, having learned, I suppose, that it is my intention to retire, he shrewdly concludes this is the proper time for driving a good bargain (an old man of business, you see); and no sooner is he returned to Sainville (he came the day before yesterday) than he writes to me about it. Ah! if it were not for these rheumatics! but it cannot be helped: besides, you may really do as well. You now understand why I sent for you. Monsieur de Sainville is to come at ten, and I want you to treat with him, or rather open the negotiations. I do not at all expect they will be of the Talleyrand school; but I have a strong impression that he will attempt a Bonaparte *coup-de-main*, and I would therefore have you on your guard."

"See him!" ejaculated Nathalie; "nay, madame, it would not be right,—it would not be proper."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said the schoolmistress, with a prim smile, "you know how I respect such scruples, yet allow me to say, you now go to the other extreme. In the first place, business can be transacted with any one; in the second place,

Monsieur de Sainville is very different from his nephew."

Nathalie looked up with astonishment. It seemed strange no one should ever imagine what Monsieur de Sainville had once been to her. She pressed her hand to her forehead without answering. Mademoiselle Dantin looked at her with a very dissatisfied air.

"Really," she observed, with much asperity, "I cannot imagine what you find improper in what I suggest, Mademoiselle Montolieu. I believe I have as strict notions as any young lady on the delicacy and reserve becoming persons of the opposite sex. Yet I should feel no hesitation in meeting Monsieur de Sainville on any business matter; otherwise I might labour under some slight diffidence; and it strikes me as very extraordinary that you should object. Am I to understand," she added, with an alarmed air, "that Monsieur de Sainville is not one to be trusted with a *tête-à-tête?* You certainly know him better than I do."

"Oh, madame!" exclaimed Nathalie, "I do not mean that. You might see him, assuredly; but how can I?"

"If you allude to the fact of my being your elder," very sharply replied the schoolmistress, "I beg to assure you that it is one of the delusions of youth to imagine this fact makes such a difference to men. But I must confess I am concerned to hear such a character of Monsieur de Sainville."

"Good heavens, madame!" interrupted Nathalie colouring with impatience and vexation, "is it possible you should imagine anything so absurd?"

"I see no absurdity in it," replied Mademoiselle Dantin, raising herself up in bed with a dignified air, which was increased by the white and peaked night-cap, not unlike a helmet, which she wore; "and indeed I begin to understand ——"

Here the door opened, and Marianne, still startled as of old, announced that Monsieur de Sainville was below.

"Come, my dear child," said the schoolmistress, whose scruples this announcement immediately banished, "do be sensible; and remember that Monsieur de Sainville is a grave man—quite incapable of anything indecorous. I should not insist, but for this rheumatism, which will keep me here heaven knows how long."

"No, I cannot,—indeed I cannot!" exclaimed Nathalie, averting her flushed and troubled face.

"Then I shall go myself," exclaimed the schoolmistress, in high dudgeon, "and we shall see if Monsieur de Sainville will dare to misbehave himself with me."

Nathalie paced the room with irresolute steps, but as Mademoiselle Dantin was preparing to rise, the young girl suddenly stopped near her bed, and said, arresting her with a gesture:—

"You need not, madame, I will meet him."

Her face was pale, her voice was low, but there was firmness and resolve in both.

"You know that you are to ask ten thousand francs, and a thousand francs for Madame Ledru," urged the schoolmistress, as she was turning away.

"Yes, madame, I know."

"Stay another moment, Mademoiselle Montolieu, I wish to give you some further instructions. This house, you are aware, is very valuable. Monsieur de Sainville may intend pulling it down, but he cannot conscientiously hope to get the property for less on that account. Indeed, I may say this circumstance rather increases its value, since this house, aving been inhabited by my late lamented father, my filial feelings will be greatly outraged at its being touched; I shall therefore—apart from thevalue of the property, and the damages of Madame Ledru—expect a handsome consideration. You understand."

"Yes, madame, I understand," calmly replied Nathalie; she had, indeed, heard every word; but whilst the schoolmistress spoke, her look remained fastened on a small mirror before her. A far deeper feeling than vanity made her look at the image which its depths revealed, and wonder if the keen look she was going to meet, would find her much changed. Nathalie might have felt quite easy: a little paler she was, but, upon the whole, her beauty had not suffered. There was too much wounded pride in all her sorrow for it to affect the springs of life: her grief had been deep, but never despairing.

This same pride which had made her endure so much in uncomplaining silence, now forbade her to

avoid this meeting. She did not think he would imagine she had sought it; she would show him she did not dread it. He had chosen to part from her without anger, he should see that she, too, could be dispassionate, indifferent, and calm. Notwithstanding this final resolve, she paused on reaching the door of the salon, and a strange oppressive feeling came over her; but she remembered the past, called resentment to her aid, and entered. She closed the door, then stood still, outwardly calm, but with a beating heart.

Monsieur de Sainville sat near the table, facing the glass door. The dull light fell on his features; Nathalie did not feel that he looked paler—he had always been pale—but more rigid and severe. He rose, and slowly turned round; but as his look fell on the quiet figure of Nathalie, standing in the gloom of the apartment, he suddenly remained motionless. His countenance did not so much express surprise as incredulity.

"He came back before yesterday, and did not even know I was here," thought Nathalie, with a slight degree of bitterness. He did not so much as bow to her, but she coldly inclined her head, and said, as she came forward.

"Mademoiselle Dantin is very sorry, sir, that a slight indisposition should prevent her from meeting you."

"Another day will do as well," he replied, taking up his hat.

"Mademoiselle Dantin," continued Nathalie,

"fearing that her indisposition is likely to continue, has authorized me to hear your proposals, and, to some extent, to treat in her name."

Monsieur de Sainville slowly looked up and eyed the young girl very fixedly; but the cold, haughty glance that met his said, in language not to be misunderstood, "we are strangers."

The possibility of objection on his part did not, indeed, seem to occur to her. She took a seat as she spoke, placed a quire of paper on the table, and drew forward the inkstand as if for the purpose of taking notes of Monsieur de Sainville's remarks. For a moment there was a slight degree of hesitation in his manner, but it vanished almost immediately, and, with composure equal to that of Nathalie, he resumed his seat and said, quietly,

"Having understood that Mademoiselle Dantin intends retiring, I concluded she would no longer have the same objection to part with her property which she formerly manifested. Are you aware whether it is so?"

"Yes, sir, it is so."

"Pray what exact value does Mademoiselle Dantin set on her property?"

"Ten thousand francs," quietly said Nathalie.

"Ten thousand francs!" he quickly echoed; "this is surely some mistake?"

"No mistake, sir; Mademoiselle Dantin's words were clear, and I paid them all the attention necessary in such matters."

"You are quite sure of it?" he said, with a fixed look.

"Quite sure," she answered with undiminished composure.

"But the property is not worth five," he exclaimed, with a decision that justified Mademoiselle Dantin's provisions of a Bonaparte *coup-de-main*.

Nathalie shook her head.

"The property is very valuable, sir," she seriously replied; "the house, for instance——"

"Is only fit to be pulled down," he interrupted.

"But the garden is large."

"A mere strip," he somewhat contemptuously replied.

"The beech-tree is very fine."

"Decaying fast, I assure you; only fit to be cut down and sold as very indifferent timber."

"The poplars are good," rejoined Nathalie, who was growing piqued.

"Yes, but quite young, and of the worthless *fatigata* species."

His manner was so decis iv and cool that it irritated Nathalie. She rose and said, quickly,

"Very well, sir, I shall mention to Mademoiselle Dantin that you think nothing on all her property worth purchasing."

She spoke with some of her old hastiness.

"I beg your pardon," he said, more coolly still, "you quite mistake my meaning. On the house, beech, and poplars, I set indeed no value, for they

are valueless; but the land itself is worth something."

"Is it, really?" cried Nathalie, with ill-suppressed resentment.

"Yes, certainly, worth the sum I offered. At the same time, as it is only natural Mademoiselle Dantin should attach some sort of value to the house and trees, I am willing to add another thousand francs. In short, to give her six thousand francs for the whole, provided only I may enter into possession within a month. It will take some time to prepare and lay out this place for next summer."

"Then he means to remain in Sainville," thought Nathalie, and the thought occupied her so much that she forgot to reply.

"Do you think Mademoiselle Dantin will accede to these conditions?" he resumed, after a pause.

"Perhaps so," carelessly replied Nathalie.

"I should like an answer before I leave," he continued, drawing forth his watch, "and I have an appointment at eleven."

"She declines, sir, she declines," said Nathalie, indignantly; "six thousand francs for a property like this! I do not know whether I shall insult Mademoiselle Dantin by mentioning the proposal."

He smiled coldly.

"I assure you," he said, "you may venture on repeating it. A worthless house——"

"It is not worthless to her," interrupted Nathalie, colouring; "it is no stately building, but she has

lived in it for many years; her father lived here before her; she objects, sir, to having it destroyed; strongly objects."

"For how much will she wave that objection?"

"Sir!"

"I am afraid I do not express myself very clearly; my meaning is, for what sum will Mademoiselle Dantin consent to put by her feelings and resign herself to see this house levelled to the earth?"

"Are feelings bought and sold?" asked Nathalie, with something like disdain.

"I believe it is no rare occurrence," he calmly replied, with that peculiar smile which she knew so well. "But if Mademoiselle Dantin does really object to having this house destroyed, I am surprised the objection did not occur at once to so clear-minded a person. She surely never imagined I was buying her ricketty house for the purpose of allowing it to stand."

"And why not?" sharply asked Nathalie.

Without seeming to notice her evident irritation, he continued:

"Are you quite sure that in her instructions there was not some sort of clause with regard to this—some sum named as an equivalent for her wounded feelings?" He fastened a keen, penetrating glance on her, as he spoke; she coloured deeply, in spite of herself, at this instance of his old clear-sightedness; but she merely replied:

"Mademoiselle Dantin is willing to part with her

property, sir, otherwise she would not have affixed any value to it."

"And I believe the sum you mentioned was that of ten thousand francs."

"Yes, sir; ten thousand francs."

"Which I cannot think of giving," he replied, rising as he spoke. "You will perhaps be good enough to mention to Mademoiselle Dantin what has passed between us. She may be induced to reflect, and alter her resolve."

He bowed politely, and left her. As strangers they had met; as strangers they parted. For a few seconds Nathalie did not move; she remained standing in the same spot, and with her eyes fastened on the door which had closed behind him.

"Heart of stone!" she said, at length, and burning tears of resentment and pride fell down from her eyelashes on her cheek.

Nathalie was going up to her room for the night, when Marianne handed her a letter which had been brought for her from the château.

She knew the handwriting and seal, yet she felt no emotion. She went upstairs quietly, laid both the letter and the light which she carried on a table, and busied herself about the room. Full five minutes elapsed before she returned to the spot where it lay.

"I had forgotten it," she said to herself; for pride has its own cherished deceits.

She broke the seal open, and read:

"Nathalie, what a mere child you are! Is it possible you thought to deceive me, and do you imagine I wished to deceive you? I did not think to see you at Mademoiselle Dantin's, for I did not know you were there; but when you thus suddenly stood before me, I felt like the father of a lost and wayward child, who longs to efface the memory of past severity with a caress and a kiss. I will not say you chilled—that is not in your power—but you repressed that mood. I saw that your resentment had not abated; that you would be cold and haughty; I humoured you. One soon gets into the spirit of the past; but believe me, it is an easy and common accomplishment, unworthy of your native frankness and my experience. Several times I resolved to compel you—as I believe I could—to break through this distant bearing; but upon the whole, I thought it better not. You wished to impose this trial upon yourself and me; you had perhaps the right to do so. But I do not write to speak of this.

"I once wrote to you that we had loved unwisely: I do not unsay the words, but I add that we parted more unwisely still. I have tried to unlove you, and found that what might once have been easy enough had become a hard lesson to learn. Oh! different indeed is the love which springs in the fervid heat of youth from that which entwines itself around the heart of man in his maturer years. The one is mere passion, but the other is even as the blood that flows in his veins: the staff of his life, the condition

of his being. Happy are those who pass through that first delirious phase, and never know the tyrannic power of the second. Where there is judgment and will passion can be made an obedient slave, but love is ever master. When we parted I remembered another such separation linked with the story of my youth, and thought that after one brief pang I should grow calm again. I found that years had passed over me since then; that the habits of my mind had changed; that the elasticity of my first feelings had vanished. I saw that the love I had thought to subdue so easily, would long be a living fire in my heart. I vainly sought to forget those many trifles which had once made you so dear and attracted me so irresistibly. I was haunted by the very tones of your gay, girlish voice, by your cheerful smile and frank look. When I strove to banish your image, it only followed me more importunately; I went from place to place, but it was ever before me like a living presence: it looked at me with sad, reproachful eyes; for in those day-dreams I saw you not as you are—unchanged in aspect—but pale, drooping, and sorrowful: I could not escape it wherever I might go. For him who loves there is no solitude.

"When I saw how it was with me, I resolved to come back here, firmly determined not to feign an indifference I did not feel, but to ask you at once to forget the past, and become my wife. I arrived the other evening without sending word or token,

hoping to find you in that place where I had seen you so often, and which, I also hoped, you would leave no more. That you were not there, was the first proof I got of your resentment. Harsh I may have been, yet mine has not been the sin no woman forgives: I have not ceased to love. You never had been dearer to me than on the day we parted, and I have loved you since then more truly than ever.

"I write thus because it is true, not to move you. If your own heart does not impel you to reconciliation and forgetfulness of the past, I wish not for either. Its arguments, as you once said, are worth all my logic. For this same reason I have not asked you for an interview. I do not wish you to yield in a moment of emotion, and repent it ever afterwards. I am not changed, Nathalie; you can see it by this confession; I am the same as ever; if you think I was once too severe and exacting, do not deceive yourself, for I do not wish to deceive you: I shall be so still.

"How will you act? I cannot tell. You have a generous heart and a resentful temper. I ask you frankly and honestly to forget; you cannot doubt my sincerity; and because you cannot doubt it, I do not and will not seek to influence your feelings. Reflect and decide; whatever your decision may be, I promise you beforehand not to seek to change it. If you refuse, I shall understand that by too much severity I have alienated your affection, and submit

to that solitude to which my peculiar temper and character perhaps condemn me."

Nathalie laid this letter down and paced her room with uneven and irresolute steps. He loved her still; but that, perhaps, she had never doubted. She felt not only that he loved her, but that he had missed her deeply, and longed to have her back again. Yes, he would have a cold, solitary life of it without the gay and graceful girl who had once shed the sunshine of her presence in his home; he would miss her as woman, companion, mistress, and wife. For she often felt that his love was a mixture of many feelings, that he loved her beauty, girlish grace, and piquant temper, and yet that, with all this, there lingered a deeper and holier feeling for her in his heart. All this she knew, and, therefore, that he should return to her did not astonish her so very much.

But she felt wounded to find that he was, as he said himself, unchanged. Well might he say so! In every word he traced she read even more than his old haughtiness and pride. He came back to her, indeed, but in no submissive or suppliant mood did he return. Not thus haughtily had he wooed her when he first spoke of love! He had then stooped to argument and impassioned entreaty, and yet he knew very well that she loved him in her heart, and that little eloquence was needed to win the boon he sought. Why was he so reserved and so cautious now?

"It is pride, cold haughty pride," she exclaimed inwardly, "he will not seek to influence, because he will not beseech for that which he most desires; he would have no interview because he feared to betray himself. Be it so; I shall show him that my pride is as strong and as unbending as his can ever be."

She took up his letter and read it once more. Her heart failed her as she perused the beginning, but she gathered courage with the close. Still she hesitated, but at length her resolve was taken. She wrote a few words at the bottom of Monsieur de Sainville's letter, sealed it up, and went down. She met the servant in the passage.

"Marianne," said she, "can you take this letter for me to the château early to-morrow morning?"

"I can take it to-night," replied Marianne.

"And why not to-morrow?" asked Nathalie, with a strange feeling of hesitation.

"It will be much more convenient for me to-night," simply replied Marianne.

"Oh! very well," said Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Are you ill, mademoiselle?" asked the girl with some surprise, "your voice is trembling so."

She brought forward the light she held, so that its ray fell on the pale and troubled face of Nathalie.

"No," quickly answered Nathalie, "I am not ill; you are right; go to-night—go quickly."

She told her to go quickly, and yet the letter lingered in her hand. The girl had to take it of her

own accord. Scarcely had she reached the door when Nathalie called her back. Had she altered her mind? No. She merely bade her not be long away, and promised to wait for her by the half-open door. In less than five minutes the girl returned.

"I gave it to a servant, who took it up instantly," she said.

"Thank you, Marianne."

Nathalie returned to her room. She sat down on a chair and remained there pale and motionless, her eyes fixed on the floor, her hands clasped on her knees for several hours. Did she regret or repent the final step she had taken? it were hard to tell; yet this can be said, had the letter been in her possession once more, she would assuredly have sent it.

CHAPTER X.

Three days passed away.

Monsieur de Sainville sent no other letter to Nathalie; but she learned that on the day after receiving her answer, he had called on Mademoiselle Dantin, and failed in coming to an agreement with her.

"I never saw so sharp a man," angrily exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin: "no matter what you say, he has something ready for it. But his Buonaparte *coup-de-main* did not succeed with me, I assure you, Mademoiselle Montolieu."

Love disappointments evidently did not influence Monsieur de Sainville, or impair his talents in matters of business.

Nathalie repented less than ever.

On the morning of the fourth day she received a note from the Canoness, informing her that her nephew had once more departed on his travels, and

begging her to call in the course of the evening. Mademoiselle Dantin, whom this intelligence greatly irritated, and who was not, therefore, in the best of tempers with the château, gave no very gracious consent, and observed with some asperity :—

"I hope, at least, Mademoiselle Montolieu, that you will be so good as to be in at eight."

Nathalie quietly assented. Thanks to the obstacles which her kind mistress raised one after the other; she could not call on her old friend until near seven.

"Oh! Petite," reproachfully said the Canoness, as she entered the drawing-room, "I thought you would not come."

"I could not be here earlier."

She sat down as she spoke, and rested her head on one hand, whilst the other hung listlessly by her side: she looked neither right nor left.

"Are you ill?" asked the Canoness, who was eyeing her wistfully.

"I have a head-ache."

"And yet you came; that was kind, Petite, I dare say you guess how dreary I feel alone, in this great house."

"Then you are alone?" asked Nathalie, looking up.

"Why, of course," replied the Canoness, "since Armand is gone.

"He is gone, then?" ejaculated Nathalie.

"Did I not write that he was?"

"Yes, you did."

"Well then, why do you ask?"

"Because I had understood he meant to reside for some time in Sainville."

"Well I daresay he changed his mind," replied the Canoness, after a pause. "You see, Petite, this is no pleasant place to him. It is not to me. Oh! when you have my years, you will learn that every place is haunted, and none so much as the place where we lived in youth."

Nathalie looked around her. D id it require length of days to acquire that bitter knowledge? This place was haunted for her too. Had she not dreamed there the thrilling and delightful dreams of youth—dreams too quickly faded; flowers withered whilst yet in their early spring?

"No," resumed the Canoness, "it is no pleasant place to him; I saw he felt it when he came back here the other evening, Yes, the past rose before him then."

She looked at Nathalie with some significance; but a bitter smile flitted across the features of the young girl.

"No doubt," she said, "Monsieur de Sainville must be reminded here of many things,—of his early love, for instance."

"Oh! Petite," replied the Canoness, with sorrowful reproach, "you say what in your heart you do not believe. Think of her! who thinks of her in this wide world save me? Not the husband, who instead of a childless, unloving bride, has a wife and

many children round him now. Not he whom she loved, and who rejected her so sternly! For between her memory and him there is, as you know full well, the memory of a second and far deeper love."

"Deeper!" echoed Nathalie.

"Ay, deeper; I say not so to justify him, for my heart is sore against Armand. There were two young girls, one gentle and winning, the other spirited and warm-hearted; but both, I may say it, though you are one, both beautiful, pure, and good, and very dear to me. He loved and sought them both, and what was the end? It was natural he should seek Lucile; they had been brought up together. But you! good heavens was there no other woman he could fix upon? He had travelled far and wide; he had been years away; he was rich; many, ay many of the women he must have met would have had him gladly. Could he not marry some prudent maid or widow of thirty? Why should he fall in love with you, precisely you, whom I had fixed upon to remain here with me? Why did he come evening after evening to the *boudoir* to teaze and torment you as one does with a bird, at whose pecking and vexation one only laughs? Why did he for ever keep coming to the garden after us, so that we could never be five minutes alone? Why did he make you fall in love with him? It still puzzles me to know how he did that, since from that moment all went wrong. When I spoke you answered at random; when he spoke I

knew he was talking for you all the time, for he was fond of you in his way, and would think of nothing else; in short I had nothing else to do but to sleep or leave the room. Still it was not that I minded, for I saw you were both happy."

"He was not," interrupted Nathalie.

"Yes he was," pettishly said the Canoness; "I know him better than you do. It was one thing when you were away, and one thing when you were by. Then he no longer looked as he almost always looks—wrapped up within himself, thinking to himself, and talking to himself; no, there was something open and friendly about him then. Ah! Petite, the woman who has made a man unselfish has achieved a miracle."

She eyed the young girl wistfully; but Nathalie remained cold and unmoved.

"He could not forget you even at the last," pursued the Canoness; "he was anxious about you; he wished you to be here with me."

"To live in this house, in his house! to eat his bread!" indignantly exclaimed Nathalie.

"He meant to remain years away."

"Had he meant to be away for an eternity, the house was none the less his; I could not have lived in it. Those walls would not have sheltered, they would have stifled me. Oh, Marraine! I love you much, else I had never crossed this threshold again. I have never done so without pain. I have never sat here in this old familiar place without a secret sickening of the heart; never."

"Resentful girl!" said the Canoness, chidingly, "What if he were sorry?"

"He is not."

"I say he is. Do you know him as I do? Are you his aunt? Can you remember the time when he was born? Have you my powers of observation? He is sorry, and it serves him well," added the Canoness very bitterly. "I saw it when he came home the other evening. 'You are alone, aunt?' he said, and gave a strange, rueful look around, but never mentioned your name. I watched him, he scarcely spoke, but kept glancing about the room very restlessly, as if seeking something. Once he stooped and picked up the velvet clasp I wear around my neck; you wore one like it once; he held it up and looked at it silently in his hand, but he never said: 'Is it hers?' 'I am so glad you have found it,' I cried; he kept looking at it, and never gave it me. 'It dropped from my neck,' I continued. He laid it down soon enough then. After a while he got up and walked up and down the room; his old habit, you know, and every time there was a sound below of opening and closing doors, I could see him pause and listen; but he never said: 'Do you expect her?' or 'Is she coming?' As he was going away for the evening, he bent over the vase of flowers on that table, and said carelessly: 'Where did you get these?' 'Oh, they came from the greenhouse, of course,' I replied. 'Then you went there to-day?' 'Went there in this cold weather, Armand?' 'Then

who gathered them?' he asked impatiently. 'A servant, to be sure.' He looked disappointed, but still he would not utter your name. The whole of the next day he remained at home; he was tired he said, but he was expecting you, for he never left me. I have learned since he had forbade the servants to say he had returned. In the course of the evening he looked up at me once or twice; I thought he was going to speak, but he did not—and I said nothing."

The Canoness paused, and again looked at the young girl. A slight emotion passed over the features of Nathalie, but she said calmly: "I grant that he is sorry; I should not have denied it; indeed, why deceive you? He has asked me to forget the past and become his wife."

The Canoness looked confounded.

"He has!' she at length exclaimed, "and what answer did you give?"

"That to forget is not to forgive!"

"You refused?" cried the Canoness, in a tone of angry reproach. "Oh, Petite! I thought you loved me! You refused when all might have been made right; when you might have been married to him, and we could have lived all three together—so comfortably."

Nathalie did not answer.

"If I had only guessed it, I would not have allowed it," dismally continued Aunt Radegonde. "Surely I have a right to interfere; but who thinks of me? who cares for me?" Pray," she added, with a very melancholy groan, "when was it?"

"On Monday; he wrote to me."

"It was like his pride; he should have seen you, and not left you until you said 'yes.'"

"But he would not, nor would I consent," replied Nathalie, with a smile at her self-inflicted wound.

"Did you write back to him on Monday evening?" asked the Canoness.

"Yes, on Monday evening," quietly replied Nathalie.

"Then that was the letter he received whilst here with me," thoughtfully resumed the Canoness.

"What did he say? how did he look?" exclaimed Nathalie, laying her hand on the arm of the Canoness, and fastening a burning look upon her.

"Say, child," replied Aunt Radegonde, a little startled, "why, if he had said anything, I should have known."

"Well, but how did he look?" urged Nathalie.

"Why, as usual."

"Not grieved—not sorry?"

"How can I tell, Petite? He seldom shows anything of the sort, and my penetration was not in the least on the alert about that letter; I thought it came from Mademoiselle Dantin. When the servant brought it in, he just glanced at it, as he took it from the plate, and laid it down then without seeming in any great hurry to open it. Yet, I remember now, he looked rather thoughtful as he stood before me on the hearth within reach of the table. Well, he did

take it up and read it at length, and stood for a while with it in his hand."

"How did he look then?"

"As usual. He quietly folded it up."

"Without looking at it again?" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Yes, Petite; well, he folded it up, and put it into his pocket-book, and—that was all."

"And that was all!" echoed Nathalie, falling back into her old attitude, and relaxing her hold of the Canoness's arm. "Not one doubt that sight might have deceived him; not one despairing feeling to make him say, 'this cannot be true,' not even an exclamation or a look of regret. Oh! if he believed it so readily, he never loved me."

"He did love you, he does love you still, foolish child," ruefully said the Canoness, "and since he loved you so well as to conquer his pride, he would have made you a very happy woman. Oh! the pleasant evenings we should have had all three by the fireside; but through your obstinacy," she added, rocking herself in her chair, "all this is upset; I am, of course, to remain alone; I who might have had so delightful an old age; he will live and die an old bachelor, alone; and you will live and die an old maid, like Mademoiselle Dantin—alone, of course."

"Be it so," replied Nathalie, with something like energy; "be it so, I can endure that fate; solitude may sadden, but shall not terrify me. I have shown

him at least that his wealth and rank could not bribe the poor teacher."

The Canoness shook her head and coughed drily.

"Foolish child," she said again, "do you know Armand so little, as not to be aware that he has a very good opinion of himself? What man has not? Why, it would not so much as enter his head that a woman did not marry him for love? Besides, he knows you so well. Oh! foolish, foolish child!"

She shook her head and groaned. Nathalie looked up at her hesitatingly.

"What do you mean by saying he knows me so well?" she asked at length.

"I mean that he knows your character. Shortly after that evening when he told me he was going to marry you, I asked him why he had set his mind on so young a girl? 'Because I love her,' he carelessly replied; he was never very fond of answering questions. 'Well, but why do you love her, Armand?' I persisted, for though I am not inquisitive, I wished to know. 'Because she is young, pretty and charming,' he answered. I said I was sure he had some better reason. 'Well, then,' he said, 'it is because she has such a good, generous heart.' 'How do you know?' I asked, to try him. 'How! why by her look, her smile, her voice; by her very way of speaking, by her step if you like. Be content, aunt, I am never mistaken in character, and I know exactly what sort of bride I am wooing. She charms me because she is very pretty, and I am not of those

whom beauty terrifies. She provokes me with her changeable temper, but I like to be thus provoked, and feel in myself enough power to rule.' "

"He said that?" interrupted Nathalie, with great indignation.

"Yes, Petite, but let me go on," replied the Canoness, looking at the clock. "'She makes me love her,' he continued, 'because she has such a very warm, guileless nature. It is like a summer's day of her own Provence—rather hot, but how bright and genial! Indeed, aunt, though you look so doubtful, she shall be happy and have her way in almost everything. Yes, she shall feed, comfort and cherish as many *protégées* as she likes, and fill the house with pets if she so chooses. No doubt she will be imposed upon every day—never to be made wiser,—there is no cure for a kind heart—and no doubt both *protégées* and pets will be wonderful pests, but in all that can gladden her—poor child! she is easily gladdened—in all that can make her cheerful face wear a more cheerful look, she shall have her way.' Well, Petite, what is the matter?" suddenly added the Canoness, as she saw Nathalie bury her face in her hands and weep bitterly.

"Oh! aunt," she cried, looking up and rising as she spoke, "do you think I have no heart? do not, pray do not torment me so! Do not tell me how kindly he loved me once. I know it, let me forget it. Why have you spoken thus the whole evening? Why do you keep telling me he regrets me? Did I

not, too, feel something on coming in here this evening? Did I not say to myself: 'this is the place he left a few hours back, and where the warmth and breath of his presence still linger.' I am proud, resentful, I have rejected him; but I am made of flesh and blood, I have a woman's heart, and when I think of him and say to myself, 'it is past, it is quite over; he is gone again, perchance for years,' that heart feels as if it were well-nigh breaking."

She spoke with passionate vehemence, and many broken sobs. The Canoness was strangely moved; her features worked; she rose from her seat and clasped her hands; they trembled visibly; indeed, she shook from head to foot.

"Petite," she said, in a broken tone, "it is true he is gone; but I never said he would be so long away. He may come back sooner, much sooner than one thinks—there is no knowing. It wants a quarter to eight; that used to be his time; I do not say he will come to-night, and yet who knows?"

She ceased. Nathalie no longer heeded her. She had turned suddenly, arrested in a listening attitude towards the entrance of the drawing-room; a well-known step was on the stairs; the door opened; he entered.

The pause of sudden surprise as he saw her told her but too plainly that he was not privy to his aunt's scheme.

"I shall never forgive you, never," cried Nathalie, turning towards Aunt Radegonde. He looked at her

pale indignant face as she spoke and understood it all.

"You have deceived me," continued the young girl, with rising anger. "I trusted you and you brought me—here." She uttered the last word with an indignant scorn that amazed and terrified the Canoness, little prepared for so abrupt a change of mood.

"Petite," she deprecatingly said, "I meant well; how did I know there had been an explanation? Oh! do not go," she added, seizing the young girl's hand, and seeking still more to detain her by her appealing look.

"Pray let me go," replied Nathalie, in the coldest tones, but speaking with subdued irritation.

"No," resolutely persisted the Canoness, "you must not go; shall she, Armand?"

She turned to her nephew, as if imploring for aid.

Monsieur de Sainville, who had slowly come forward, now looked up and said deliberately:—

"And why should not Mademoiselle Montolieu be perfectly free to stay or depart at her pleasure?"

His aunt looked confounded.

"Why, above all," he resumed, "should you appeal to me, aunt, when you know it is only because I enter this room she wishes to leave it?"

"Oh, Armand!" reproachfully replied his aunt, "could you find nothing but that to say?"

He did not answer, but the contraction of his brow, the rigid compression of his pale firm lips, the reso-

lute meaning of his fixed glance, told not of humble or beseeching mood.

"And so you will go?" sorrowfully said Aunt Radegonde, addressing Nathalie, whose hand she had relinquished.

"Be satisfied, aunt," observed her nephew, with some slight degree of bitterness, "I shall soon leave Sainville."

Nathalie suddenly stopped short in the act of putting on her shawl, and raised her flushed face.

"If you mean to say, sir," she exclaimed, "that your absence will induce me ever to enter this house again—you are mistaken."

"There!" cried the Canoness, in a tone of despair, "you have done it, Armand; matters were not bad enough; you have done it, when you might so easily have asked her to forget the past."

"I have asked her," said Monsieur de Sainville, in a tone which implied, "I will not ask again."

"Come, Petite, he asks you to forget," eagerly said the Canoness, with a slight perversion of the truth; "do answer something."

"I have answered," coldly replied Nathalie, and her look said: "Nothing shall make me unsay that answer."

The Canoness indignantly sank down in her arm-chair, whilst she glanced from her nephew to Nathalie, as they stood facing one another, but with averted glances, on the hearth before her.

"Oh! you are well matched," she angrily exclaimed,

" for you are both as proud and relentless as Lucifer himself!"

One impulse made Monsieur de Sainville and the young girl look up as the Canoness spoke thus. For the first time their eyes met; a change came over his features, and she slightly turned pale.

" You, Armand," continued the Canoness, " would break any woman's heart, and your own along with it—that is, if you had a heart to break—sooner than give in; and you, Mademoiselle Nathalie, you would cry your eyes out, and die with grief, sooner than say: 'I am sorry.'"

" Aunt," coldly said her nephew, " the time has long gone by when men's hearts broke, and ladies dimmed their eyes with weeping. If women do suffer from these things, they take care to lose none of their beauty. Sorrow falls very lightly on them."

Nathalie paused in the act of turning away to look at him with a somewhat haughty smile. She understood the implied reproach, and triumphed in it.

" And why not?" she asked, " why should not sorrow fall lightly on them?"

" Nay," he replied, with a smile as cold as hers was haughty, " I do not complain; it also renders self-reproach more light."

" *Oh, mon Dieu!*" mournfully exclaimed the Canoness, " it is getting worse and worse!"

" Aunt," quietly replied the nephew, " you mistake this case; the question is simply that, for reasons which then seemed to me very powerful, I

thought it would be wise, for Mademoiselle Montolieu's sake, especially, to break our mutual engagement. I say for her sake especially, because the thought of her happiness was my most powerful motive."

"An instance of forethought I shall never forget," emphatically said Nathalie.

"So you have been kind enough to declare," replied Monsieur de Sainville. "But to resume. I have thought since then that I might have been mistaken; I have frankly said so to Mademoiselle Montolieu; she has declined taking this view of the subject; it was her right; I do not complain. This, aunt, is the case; this, and no more."

"Oh, this is the case, is it?" mournfully said Aunt Radegonde, in whom this freezing explanation destroyed every hope.

"I believe," replied her nephew, glancing towards Nathalie, "I have stated the case fairly."

"Very fairly," she composedly replied.

The Canoness glanced from one to the other with inexpressible sorrow.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she said very sadly, "it has come to this! You two who were to pass through life as one, you now speak so coldly! not even as enemies, but as distant strangers. And yet you were once fond of one another. I have seen you, Armand, restless until she came. I have seen you, Petite, unhappy because you thought you had vexed him. And now, *mon Dieu!* now!" She bowed

her head, and her eyes filled with tears. Monsieur de Sainville looked disturbed, and began walking up and down the room; Nathalie repeatedly changed colour, and stood for awhile irresolute; she was abruptly turning away from Aunt Radegonde's chair, when Monsieur de Sainville suddenly stopped in his promenade, and stood still on the hearth before her. For a few seconds they eyed each other in mutual silence.

"Will you, or will you not?" he at length briefly asked.

He spoke with no lover's look, and in no lover's tone; but with that strange mixture of anger and tenderness to which the deepest feelings are often stirred in the human heart.

Had he put the same question in a gentle or guarded speech, denial would instantly have risen to Nathalie's lips; but now she could not reply; she could only tremble and turn pale. There was more than entreaty in his vehement tone and fixed look; these told of a love deep and unconquered still; a love against which pride and will had long struggled, and alike struggled in vain.

"Yes, she will, she will," eagerly cried the Canoness, bending forward; "she will, Armand."

Nathalie looked up; a reply was on her lips; the Canoness hastened to check it by reiterating:

"Indeed she will, Armand."

"Aunt," he replied, "you mean well; but you do not understand either Nathalie or me. She is not

one to be cheated out of consent; nor am I one," he added, after a pause, "to be satisfied with consent thus obtained. I have asked a plain question; she will give a plain reply."

"As plain as you wish," began Nathalie.

"No, Petite, no," interrupted the Canoness, alarmed at the pale severity which the young girl's features suddenly assumed; "no, do not."

"Nay, let her," observed Monsieur de Sainville, with some bitterness, "I know her; she is a true woman, resentful and unforgiving."

"Resentment!" replied Nathalie, in her coldest tones. "I have no resentment. And as for forgiveness, I have not, thank heaven, endured such sorrow as to render it difficult."

He raised his look slowly until it met hers.

"I understand you and your meaning," he answered; "but do not think to deceive me. I seek not to deceive you. I say frankly, I have suffered. You may look at me if you like, and ask yourself why a few months have left those traces on my brow? Refuse again if you wish, but stoop not to feign an indifference you do not feel."

Nathalie had heard him with resolutely-averted look, as if resolved not to heed whatever he might say. When he bade her look at him, she involuntarily raised her glance. He looked pale and careworn. For a moment she eyed him with calm composure, but suddenly she trembled, and her eyes

filled with tears; she shook them away almost immediately, as if ashamed and indignant at the weakness.

"I will not yield," she passionately cried; "no, I will not forget or forgive that which I shall remember and resent whilst memory and life are left me. You are right in one thing at least: no, I am not indifferent; no, I am not cold; I am, as you say, a resentful, unforgiving woman, who has been wronged, and who feels it deeply. You harshly rejected me. I could not go and say, 'love me still.' I was at your mercy, and you made me feel it. I have endured the slight which only a woman can receive; I will have a woman's pride, yes, suffer as I may, and come what will."

She did not give herself time to reflect, think, or regret, but abruptly turned away, and left the room as she spoke.

"Stay, Petite, stay," cried the Canoness, rising eagerly.

But neither did Nathalie heed her, nor would her nephew allow her to follow. He laid his hand on the arm of Aunt Radegonde, and his grasp was firm as steel. He did not release her until the door below closed on Nathalie, then indeed he let her go, and began pacing the room up and down, precisely as usual.

"Then it is all over," despairingly thought the Canoness. "Heaven help me!" she inwardly added;

"of what was only separation I have made a desperate quarrel. Heaven help me!"

After walking up and down the room for about an hour, Monsieur de Sainville stopped short, and turned towards his aunt, with face so dark, and brow so severe, that the little Canoness trembled visibly. The sight of her terror recalled him to himself, for though he felt angry, he knew not how much he showed it, and was far from wishing to vent his anger upon this harmless, well-meaning creature.

"Aunt," said he, more gently than he had intended, "be not alarmed, I am not going to reproach. You did very wrong, but you meant well. It is scarcely your fault if I once more made a fool of myself. The mere act of loving implies folly and weakness, yet the greatest folly was not that which took place to-night: it was that which first led me to feel affection for a vain and heartless girl."

"Oh, Armand!" interrupted the Canoness, unable to bear this.

"I know you love her, yet she is what I say. She thinks herself proud, when she is far more resentful than proud, and more vain than either. Had she ceased to love me, I might admire her; but she has not, she loves me still to this very moment; and she has not the courage, the honesty, to be true to her love. She tried, in vain, to brave or meet my look. I believe she hesitated for a few moments, but the womanly weakness was promptly subdued; she looked at me unsteadily even then, turned away, and was

gone. Poor child! she is applauding herself now. She does not know that as the door closed upon her, her triumph ceased, for at that moment my heart banished and shut her out for ever."

The Canoness clasped her hands and wept. She had heard that inexorable voice once before. She knew again the very tones in which the irrevocable sentence of Lucile had been uttered.

"I mention this," resumed her nephew, after a brief pause, "because it is my express wish that such an attempt as you made this evening shall never be made again. Little regard as I now feel for her, I should be reluctant to inflict on any woman a severe, though merited, mortification. I do not wish to see, meet, or hear her. I would rather that her name should not be mentioned to me. It would not grieve me, but it would not be agreeable. I wish to forget her like one that has never existed. She has lost my esteem, and I do not feel very proud of ever having loved her. If it had been only a passing caprice,—a fancy for a pretty face, I could forgive myself the weakness; but it was a deeper feeling. She has wounded me as none save herself could wound, for to none have I yielded the same power. But I have no right to complain. I knew beforehand that the man who lays bare his heart to a woman must expect to see it pierced, and handled as the bird or insect given up to a cruel child. I had faith in her, thought her better and more generous than others. I have paid the penalty of my trust.

Aunt, if those tears are for me, do not shed them. I need them not; I have been ill, I am well again. If they are for her, you may spare them. Lucile was too weak to suffer; she is too vain."

He bade her good night, and left her.

CHAPTER XI.

Difference of character is said to conduce to affection. Persons of similar disposition on the contrary resemble parallel lines; they placidly take the journey of life at the same time, but not together; they follow the same track and never meet. Monsieur de Sainville and Nathalie had been mutually attracted by the great difference in their natures. Her frankness had delighted him; she had been irresistibly drawn towards him by what she conceived to be the mystery—a mystery which existed chiefly in her imagination—of his character. But, different as they were, they had many points of contact. Both were proud, exacting, and somewhat jealous. Both were independent in thought, speech and action, caring little for this world's opinion, and seeking not to win its esteem. Both, above all, whatever they wished, felt, or did, wished, felt, and did it entirely: the one with all the activity of his brain, and the force of

his will; the other with all the impulsiveness of her temper and the warmth of her heart.

But here ceased the natural similarity, and began that fictitious resemblance which ever takes place between those whom one deep feeling unites, and whom one roof shelters. This similarity had extended far enough to do mischief, and unfortunately not far enough to do good. Monsieur de Sainville had indulged in some of Nathalie's perversity of temper; the shade of his scepticism and coldness had fallen on her genial warmth. Nathalie received and accepted more than her share in this unhappy exchange. She had often admired her lover's cold firmness; she forgot that it was tempered by judgment and a deep sense of duty. She did not acknowledge to herself that she wished to imitate him, and yet it was so; and when she rejected him so inexorably, there was in her heart the secret thought of compelling him to admire and esteem her whom he had ever held and treated like a child. When she learned from the Canoness—who soon called on her, and whom she questioned closely — how differrent a result her "firmness" had obtained; how she had sunk instead of rising in her lover's opinion; how he detected the weakness of a wilful and passionate temper in what she had considered energy and strength of character, she remained thunderstruck. For it was too true that she had but one thought —whether in good or in evil—to be something to him still.

This, however, had not been her only motive for acting as she had acted. She had been stung to the quick by the cold haughtiness of Monsieur de Sainville's submission, or rather return to her. She was necessary to his happiness, but could he have done without her, he evidently would. She remembered the words of his letter, "I once wrote to you that we had loved unwisely; I do not unsay the words." "Be it so," she thought, "yes, even though the wound should sink as deep in me, as I now see it will in him."

The first taste of vengeance is sweet, but the dregs are unutterably bitter; and, daughter of the south as she was, Nathalie found it so.

Monsieur de Sainville fell ill. Let not the sentimental reader imagine that his love sorrows had anything to do with his illness. It was a dangerous fever then prevalent in the district; it seized him like many others, and like many others there came for him a day when the doctor shook his head and said:

"There is no hope."

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said the little Chevalier to her one evening, "I suppose you know Monsieur de Sainville has got the fever, and lies in a hopeless state."

She had not so much as heard of his illness. The class was over: she was standing near the window working by the fading light of dusk. She did not faint or scream, she scarcely turned pale. She

merely laid down her work, ran up to Mademoiselle Dantin's room, opened the drawer in which she knew that the key of the garden door was kept, took it, ran down to the garden, opened the door, and entered the grounds of Sainville. She had rapidly calculated that to go in openly would breed the inevitable delay of servants and messages; and what she wanted was to be in at once. Of Mademoiselle Dantin's probable wrath she did not so much as think. She entered the château unseen; ran up to the drawing-room, and appeared before the Canoness as pale and sudden as an apparition.

"You, Petite!" cried Aunt Radegonde, clasping her hands.

"Marraine," quickly said Nathalie, going up to her, "is it true? is there no hope?"

"Little hope, Petite, very little," sadly replied the Canoness.

"Marraine," said Nathalie, turning very pale, but speaking firmly, "I must see him; but first tell me this, does he know he is so ill?"

"Oh yes, he asked the doctor, who, knowing he would not like to be deceived, told him at once."

"What did he say?"

"He merely said 'indeed!' and looked thoughtful."

"He did not ask to see me? he did not utter my name?"

The Canoness shook her head.

"Marraine," said Nathalie, whilst tears flowed down her cheeks, "I must see him: he is not so ill—the

doctor is mistaken, but yet I must see him. Tell him so."

"Petite, I dare not."

"Marraine, you must. Tell him it is not she who was once to have been his bride, his wife, that now asks this boon, but the poor girl whom he sheltered under his roof, whom he called his ward, and treated like his child. Tell him that, and he will not refuse."

"Poor little thing," compassionately replied the Canoness, "do you imagine that will touch him much?"

"Try, Marraine, try; I beseech you, try. Believe me, he cannot refuse."

"Well, Petite, wait here and I shall see."

"Marraine," said Nathalie, following her to the door, "let me go up with you."

"No, no, you must not," cried the Canoness, much alarmed.

"Marraine, let me, pray let me."

"I tell you, no; he would be very angry."

"He need not know it. Let me only stand outside the door, and listen, whilst you speak to him. If he consents I can go in; if not—why then I shall retire silently."

The Canoness still refused; but Nathalie besought her so ardently, and promised so solemnly not to attempt entering the room unless Monsieur de Sainville agreed to see her, that Aunt Radegonde at length yielded. They went up to the little turret which

Monsieur de Sainville occupied. The Canoness entered the room, and left the door ajar, so that a ray of light from the dim night lamp within glided to the dark corridor, where Nathalie stood mute and pale in waiting. After asking her nephew how he felt, Aunt Radegonde mentioned the name of Nathalie, and said :—

"She has been inquiring after you, Armand; she is very anxious about you."

He did not answer.

"Armand," resumed his aunt, in a tremulous tone, "why should you not see the poor child?"

"Aunt, allow me to ask you why I should see her?"

"To forgive her, Armand."

"I assure you that I have long ago forgiven her. It is not her fault if she is heartless, any more than it was the fault of Lucile to be weak. I wish Mademoiselle Montolieu all the happiness which can fall to the lot of a human being; but I object to seeing her; she reminds me of a period of my life to which I look back with annoyance and regret; of which I feel indeed that I have no reason to be proud."

"But if she were in the house, Armand?"

"Aunt, if she were at the door of this room I would not see her."

He spoke impatiently, and, as if tired of the subject, not as if suspecting the presence of Nathalie. His aunt did not venture to add another word.

After a while she rose, and went to the door.

There was no need to remind the young girl of

her promise not to enter. Every word uttered by Monsieur de Sainville had reached her ear, as she stood there, listening with bowed head and clasped hands, like the culprit on whom the severe judge passes the irrevocable sentence. When Aunt Radegonde's sad face appeared at the door, Nathalie silently signed her to close it, then noiselessly glided down the narrow staircase. She left the château without heeding the wondering glances of servants who had not seen her enter; she went down one of the garden-walks, she took the path leading to the door; it stood, as she had left it, half-open, and only too ready to let her depart, and close on her for ever. There she paused. She looked back, her eyes blinded by tears, on the spot of which she was once to have been mistress, but from which she was now so sternly banished. She could see the faint light burning in the turret-chamber of Monsieur de Sainville, and she looked and lingered still. Oh, for the spell that could arrest her steps there; or, better still, that could lead her back to all she had left and lost—Faith, Hope, and Love! Like the first woman, she bade adieu to what had once been the Eden of her life. But Eve, at least, was not rejected by him who had sinned like her, and Nathalie felt in her heart that she had not sinned alone. He who had shared her fall shared her exile, and when she went forth banished, she left him not behind her.

She at length turned away, locked the door, and

replaced the key in the spot where she had found it. She had been about half-an-hour away. No one had noticed her absence, and it was never known.

In spite of the doctor's prediction, Monsieur de Sainville recovered.

In persisting to remain near his abode, Nathalie had only thought of punishing him; with her usual want of reflection, she did not consider that she would also punish herself. She soon learned that she had chosen a bitter and ever-renewing torment. The passion Charles Marceau had formerly felt for her had prevented any one from suspecting her engagement with Monsieur de Sainville, which, according to her wish, had been kept strictly secret. No one, therefore, felt any reserve in mentioning his name to her. She heard it daily; seldom with affection or praise. His severity, harshness, and morose temper, were ever commented upon, and bitterly censured, in her presence and hearing. Mademoiselle Dantin spoke of him with undisguised acrimony; the pupils, as of a severe, forbidding man; the gentle Chevalier himself had his word of censure, and pitied that charming lady, Madame la Chanonesse de Sainville for having so sour-looking a nephew. And whilst strangers spoke thus freely of him who had once been the hope, centre, and end of her existence, Nathalie looked calm, and betrayed not the fever which his name ever awoke in her heart.

They met sometimes, but generally at a distance.

Once, however, they were near enough for their looks to meet. Monsieur de Sainville gave her a cold glance, and rode on. Her look had been brief, but long enough to let her see that he was greatly changed: it was not, however, that he looked sad or unwell; by no means; but he looked gloomy, misanthropic, and stern. And such, indeed, he had become, according to Aunt Radegonde. He had always been a severe master, but he was now tyrannic; a strict landlord, but now, alas! he was pitiless. No fault or remission, however slight either might be, found mercy in his eyes.

"I am afraid of him," the Canoness once acknowledged to the young girl, whom she occasionally visited. "Yes, I, his aunt, am actually afraid of him, Petite; he has grown so severe and sarcastic, even with me, and even about my poor knitting! Every word he utters is bitter and relentless."

Nathalie heard her with an aching heart. No severer punishment could have fallen upon her. It had once been her ambition to make her lover a better man. She now found that, powerless as she had been for good, she was not so for evil. Oh! bitter, indeed, is the thought of inflicting evil,—moral evil,—on the being we love! "And I have done this!" she thought, "I have done this! He once asked me to conjure the evil spirits of Will and Pride, and I have brought them down in legions around him, with Harshness, Despotism, and Tyranny, and their spirits, too, in endless train."

She wept bitterly. Nor was she mistaken. She had, indeed, done much harm. Monsieur de Sainville was pitiless to others, because he could not forgive himself the mistake and weakness, for such he now deemed them, which had ever placed him in her power. And this also Nathalie knew. She had heard him say so; she could not forget the words,—they were for ever ringing in her ears, the fiat of her new destiny. "I object to seeing her; she reminds me of a period of my life to which I look back with annoyance and regret, of which I feel, indeed, that I have no reason to be proud." It had come to this between them! Her health, which had resisted his absence, sank under the torment of his return. Once she resolved to leave the school, and seek some distant home, but her heart failed her when the moment came. It was misery to stay, and deeper misery to go. But no one, not even Aunt Radegonde, ever knew what she suffered. Pride supported her externally, but pride, alas! had lost its once boasted power over her heart and its sorrowing recollections.

One Sunday afternoon, in the early days of spring, she sat with Mademoiselle Dantin, the Chevalier, and some other persons, in the dull parlour described in the first pages of this story. The conversation had fallen on Monsieur de Sainville. Never had he been more unmercifully treated. Often had Nathalie accused those who spoke thus of exaggeration, but she could not do so now, for they gave

facts. The little Chevalier was more than usually indignant.

"He is a misanthrope," he sententiously said; "he has an unnatural horror of the fair sex. Mademoiselle Beaumont told me that she met him a few days back, and asked him to direct her, having then lost her way, but he replied that he knew nothing about the place she was going to; and he said so without so much as looking at her, or behaving with common civility."

Mademoiselle Dantin smiled scornfully. She knew much worse than that. Monsieur de Sainville was a dreadful miser, a hard, stingy man. There was a poor widow, whose lease of land he had obstinately refused to renew, because a rich farmer had offered him a higher rental.

"Well, do you know," quietly said a sedate *bourgeois* of Sainville, "I think that cannot be true. At least I know a story that contradicts it entirely. Monsieur de Sainville was addressed the other day in a very rude manner, it must be confessed, by a peasant lad. He told him to hold his peace; the lad laughed. Monsieur de Sainville, without more ado, struck him with his whip. The mother raised a great outcry; he smiled very scornfully, threw her a handful of silver, and rode on."

"This cannot be true," indignantly said Nathalie; "it cannot."

"I saw it," quietly said the *bourgeois*.

"There!" triumphantly exclaimed Mademoiselle

Dantin; "did you ever hear of such a tyrant? I hate Monsieur de Sainville, and so does every one."

"No one ever comes to the château," observed the Chevalier; "no ladies are ever admitted there, it seems. I do pity that charming Canoness, and you, Mademoiselle Montolieu."

But Nathalie was gone. She was in her room pacing it with hasty and agitated steps, weeping wildly with impassioned and distracted grief. The cup her own hand had poured out for herself, was full, and conscience sternly said: "You shall drink it." Here was her power over Armand de Sainville —here her dearly prized and more dearly earned vengeance. He, the proud gentleman, so jealous of his delicacy and honour; he had struck a child, and added insult to injury. She had not the consolation of knowing that the whole story was a gross exaggeration; that the blow was an accident, and the handful of money a single silver coin; she believed it, for evening after evening she had heard such tales, and most of them, as she knew too well, were no exaggerations, but bitter truths. "God help me!" she now exclaimed inwardly. "God help me! I have been a weak and faithless woman; I knew not that to love was a holy trust and a religious faith. I gave myself up to all the follies of passion, but the woman's true tenderness was not in my heart. If I wished for a lover's idolatry, why not have Charles Marceau? With a few kind words I could have kept him as a slave at my feet. But if I wished for

serious, for higher affection, oh! why not be content with that which I won? Why weary it out with caprices? Why reject it when it returned to me, spite of all my follies? Well may he call and think me heartless! Well may he feel ashamed of having ever loved me! Well may he shut himself up and lead a gloomy and solitary life, when the being to whom he opened his heart, instead of gentle forgiveness, only thought of how she might inflict a deeper wound!"

She sat down near her open window, oppressed with care and grief. She thought of Rose, who had predicted this sorrow, and warned her against the poisoned jug of vengeance. "Oh! that she were here to give her good counsel now." She leaned her brow upon her hand; heavy with weeping, her eyes involuntarily closed. Was what followed a mere dream; the continuation of some previous thought or real communion with the dead? She thought that she saw herself in the little churchyard of Sainville, standing near her sister's tomb, when Rose suddenly appeared before her, sitting calmly at the head of her own grave, and looking at her with gentle seriousness. But as is usual in dreams, Nathalie felt neither alarmed nor astonished at the apparition. She spoke to Rose, and told her all her sorrows; but without telling her, however, the secret desire of her heart, and yet Rose, unheeding the rest, answered that desire, and said to her, with a smile: "Try."

"I dare not, Rose; I dare not."

But still her sister smiled, and said: "Try."

And her voice was so distinct and clear that Nathalie seemed to hear it still when she awoke with a sudden start. She looked around her; the little room was silent; the sun was setting in the west with a full refulgent glow which dazzled the eyes of the young girl. Her brain swam, and her heart beat tumultuously. Was it a dream or a revelation? Nathalie was not superstitious, she was too much of a southern to be mystical; no secret weakness inclined her to put faith in the supernatural. Yet for once she would believe; for once she would not heed reasoning, argument, or cold logic; for once, too, she would not pause, hesitate, or think; she would not take time to reflect, and perchance repent. She left the house at once, entered the avenue of the château, passed by the servant who admitted her without a word, and whilst he still asked if she did not wish to see the Canoness, she opened the library door and closed it behind her. Then for the first time did her heart fail her, and did she feel what she had done.

He sat near one of the windows reading; he did not hear the door open and close again; he did not see her until she stood facing him and her shadow darkened the floor before him. He slowly raised his head, looked at her fixedly, and his face darkened as he looked.

"You wish to speak to me," said he, rising; his tone was polite and chilling.

Nathalie at first could not answer; she stood before him pale and mute.

"I suppose it is my aunt you want," he observed, with slight impatience.

"No, sir, I came here to speak to you."

He offered her a seat, and resumed his. His face announced the inflexible determination of one prepared to listen, but firmly resolved not to yield. Nathalie's heart failed her.

"Sir," she said at length, in a faltering tone, "your aunt has often asked me to return to her as her companion; she said it was your wish that I should reside here with her; may I do so now?"

He gave her a keen surprised look, and coldly replied:

"How fond you must be of my aunt, Mademoiselle Montolieu!"

"May it be so?" asked Nathalie.

He frowned, and seemed much disturbed.

"You put me in a strange position," he at length replied; "allow me to inform you, lest you should be labouring under some mistake, that Sainville is and shall always be my place of residence. If any person has, therefore, given you to understand that I am going away for an indefinite period, that person has deceived you."

"No one has given me to understand this," said Nathalie, with a settled calmness that bespoke the resignation to endure much.

He looked embarrassed. There was a pause. She resumed;

"May it be so?" Her tone was beseeching and low. Her persistency seemed to provoke him.

"Your conduct is strange and indiscreet," he said at length. "You will compel me to very disagreeable frankness!"

"Pray speak freely," she quietly replied.

"Well, then, allow me to ask how we can both reside in the same house?"

Strange question from his lips! She pressed her hand to her brow; she saw herself again in that same library one evening; she heard his voice again saying: "Remain my child, remain!" and looking up, she met his cold altered face, and chilling glance.

"Sir," she answered, very calmly, "do not imagine I shall seek to encroach upon you. Do not fear that I shall seek to meet you, for I know that you would not now as you once did, like it. But even if we should chance to meet, you are so indifferent to me now, that it surely cannot affect you; besides, you need not speak; I know your face, its changes, its meaning. I know when to venture, when to draw back. A time may come when you will be indifferent and not care whether I am by, and then if chance should bring us together, I may not be quite powerless to cheer or divert your thoughts. Heaven knows I speak in no presumptuous spirit, and therefore though you now smile so coldly, I feel no hesitation and no shame in saying, that I long to do something that will lighten your cheerless solitude. Do not think for one moment I imagine

you regret me; but do not tell me you are happy; I would not believe you. I have been a little sad of late, but there are days when I feel that I am still very young. I have not lost all the gaiety of my years, that gaiety which could once please or at least make you smile. For your sake I will bring it all back, for your sake I will be cheerful and gay. Oh! let me."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he coldly asked, "do you wish to come here as my aunt's companion, or as mine?"

"I understand the taunt," said she, turning pale, "but I do not deny, it Sir. I speak not to him whose wife I was once to have been —that is past—I speak to Monsieur de Sainville, my host, guardian, friend; my shield from ill when there were none else to shield me; my adviser when I was erring; severe sometimes, and yet kind in his severity. I seek not to recall the memory of a time when feverish passion troubled and deluded; when meetings ever seemed too brief, too few; when days sped fast like hours, or lingered slow like years; when doubt was torture, and hope enchantment. But I would recall those first few weeks when I was nothing to you, save a friendless girl to protect; when you were my kind indulgent host—no more; when we met without having sought it and spoke freely; when we parted without fearing the morrow; when time had the same calm, even flow from day to day. Oh! I like to think there has been between

us some other bond besides the troubled, exacting feeling that embittered existence; that we were friends once! Why were we ever more, or rather why were we ever less? We are in the very same spot where first we met and spoke. Oh! that what has passed since then, were a dream! that some charm might carry us back to that hour! that you were again the host who questioned, and I the thoughtless girl who replied so heedlessly, and often made you smile!"

Sobs impeded her utterance. The memory, the bitter regret of friendship, affection, esteem, and confidence gone for ever, were upon her—they filled her desolate heart even to overflowing. He remained silent and unmoved.

"I regret," he at length observed, "to draw a nice distinction that has escaped you. I was your friend, and ever meant to be such; but there was, there could be no friendship between a man of my age and feelings, and a young girl of your years and temper. The feeling I had for you bore no resemblance to friendship; you know what that feeling was, how it fared, what it has become."

She bowed her head and clasped her hands; love had long been wrecked, but friendship could not perish; it had never even existed.

"Sir," she replied, in a subdued tone, "there is a feeling I thought little of till now, but which you cannot check: gratitude. I will be grateful to him who stretched out a hand to save me from disgrace;

to him who protected me against his own sister and nephew, though, as it seems now, caring nothing for me; to him who was far more generous and disinterested than I ever thought."

"And how do you know he was disinterested?" he bitterly asked. "How do you know that from the first moment you stood here before him, a young and lovely girl, the singleness of purpose, the generosity you speak of, did not vanish?"

Strange confession of a byegone love! She looked up quickly, a flush rose to her brow, but his cold smile recalled her to the present, and a sharp pang crossed her heart.

"Then since you leave me no other claim," she cried almost passionately, "let me plead by the evil I have done, the pain I have inflicted. I have hurt, I have wounded you deeply; yes, deeply, and, in spite of all your pride, you know it. Not in the name of friendship which never was, of love which soon departed, but of sorrow and suffering which abide, do I beseech you now."

"You have courage," he said, looking at her fixedly, "and generosity too, I have no doubt; but both are useless in this case. It is not my aunt's companion you wish to be; it is mine. Do you think the world would not soon notice this? Do you think it would not soon construe into the most evil sense the fact of a man of my age having for his companion and friend a young girl like you?"

He spoke in the tone o one who has raised an unanswerable objection, but she quickly replied:

"Well then, let her not be your companion or your friend; let her be your child."

But his temper, which he had evidently been restraining, forsook him as her pertinacity increased.

"Mademoiselle," he shortly replied, "I once told you I had the fatherly instinct most imperfectly developed. I have not improved since then."

"And yet you then called me your child," she sadly answered.

"Just as I called you 'Petite,' and many a foolish name besides."

Her eyes filled with tears. She remembered those names of endearment, ay, to the very low and lingering tones in which they were uttered; tones which rushed back to her now as he spoke in a voice so cold and altered.

"I was not asking for a father's affection," she resumed, "what claim have I to it? but for the shelter of a father's name. You once would not have disdained to give me that name as your wife, and I have done nothing wrong, nothing unworthy since then."

He did not reply, but his face darkened visibly.

She continued—

"You need not tell me that you will not care for me. I know and can bear it. Many a child through fault or folly is shut out from its father's heart. I shall fancy myself one of these and move silently about the house until I am at last forgiven and

restored to favour. I was proud once, too proud; but now I speak from the fulness of my heart: let me be your child, your daughter."

"A nice father I should make," he ironically said; "very kind, indulgent and amiable."

There was hesitation in his very irony. A ray of sudden hope entered her heart.

"Let me, let me," she urged. "I shall be more patient as a daughter than I have been as a mistress, than I might have been as wife. You are harsh, you say, I care not; I will bear all, but let me be your daughter."

"Foolish, foolish girl!" he bitterly exclaimed; "how can you be my daughter? Have you forgotten you were once to be my wife?"

"Forgotten it! no; but I am not the idolater I once was. I do not think now there is but one way of loving; the mist of passion has fallen from my eyes, but believe me, affection, undying affection, is still true and fervent in my heart. You know I speak not thus to win back what is lost. You know I do not. Look at me! I am no unblushing woman come to sue for love withheld. You know I am not. Therefore, I say again, let me be your daughter, your child, live here with you. Let the world wonder; it knows your honour; it will not dare suspect.

"Perhaps I may feel awkward at first as the memory of the past rises before me, but I shall know how to subdue this false and sinful shame. I shall forget the words of fondness and passion which

once greeted my ear, to think only that you liked to call me your child, and perhaps never loved me better, when you called me so. I shall forget that once I blushed, trembled, and shunned a caress, for now it is I who shall seek my father and sit down by his side if he will let me. Oh! let me be your child,—let me be your daughter."

She covered her face with her hands, and sank down on her knees before him, bowed, and weeping. At length she looked up; though his pale face seemed slightly moved, his look was stern and unrelenting still. But a faith, such as she had never known before, was in Nathalie's heart. She believed and hoped, both fervently and far too deeply to be so easily dismayed. She took his unresisting hands, she joined them on her head, she laid her head upon his knee, she said again :—

"Let me be your child."

"My child! my child, indeed!" he exclaimed in a broken tone.

She raised her glance, smiling rapturously through her tears; he stooped and lifted her up; his arms were around her, and held her fast; he gathered her to his heart; he kissed her many a time. She felt that he trembled; that tears not all her own were on her cheek; that the cold, stern man was melted; that pure love had triumphed; that faith had won. And, as she twined her arms around his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder, with all the abandonment of a daughter's holiest love, a joy far deeper,

because far more pure than any she had yet known, thrilled through the heart that now beat near his.

"God bless you, my dear child," he said at length, looking tenderly in her eyes, "you have a kind heart."

"Then you do mean it, you do mean it," she joyously exclaimed, "I am to be your child indeed."

"Poor little thing! What precious boon is this?"

"A precious boon to me. Do you imagine I do not mean to consider myself your child? Indeed I will revere and obey you as a father; nay, I will even ask you for anything I may need. Yes, without shame."

He looked much moved, but did not answer.

"I feel so happy," she continued, her cheeks deepening in colour as she spoke. "Oh! this moment ought to last for an eternity. I long to suspend time, life, and being; but you look sad and grave! Oh, *mon Dieu*! I have a dread that if I leave you, and only go out of the room, you will repent, grow stern again, and reject me."

He only smiled.

"Monsieur de Sainville!" she exclaimed, with sudden terror, "give me your word that you will not retract."

"My child," he replied, "I will promise all you like; but do not call me Monsieur de Sainville."

"And how then must I call you?" she asked, with a delighted glance, for she expected that his reply would be "Your father."

"Armand," he quietly answered.

Nathalie trembled, and averted her look.

"Armand! Armand!" she echoed, in a faltering tone, "what daughter calls her father by his name?"

There was a brief silence.

"And what wife does not call her husband thus?" he at length replied. "Do not look so startled!" he added, detaining her as she attempted to leave him; "but hear me out. I know you did not dream of this in coming here, but what matter? Our old love is gone, you will say; well, be it so. Yours was more the romance of youth than true love, and whilst loving you, I fear I cared too much for your youth and delightful beauty. I look cold, but I am not; and, alas! have never been indifferent to such things. But now, my child, your love is true,—now mine is pure."

But Nathalie was weeping; fear was at her heart; she clung close to him as if he had urged separation, not re-union.

"Oh! let me be your child," she said imploringly.

"Petite, you talk like a child; I shall make a confiding and indulging husband, but, believe me, an exacting and too jealous a father. I will have you love no other as you once loved me. I will share your affection with no living man. Remember that!" and for a moment he pressed her closer to him, with a sort of violence.

"Oh! I shall not marry, of course," said Nathalie, colouring, and speaking very eagerly.

"And do you imagine," he gravely replied, "that apart from every other consideration, I shall be so selfish as to accept the sacrifice of your existence? shall you alone be excluded from the destiny of woman? Shall you alone have no fixed position, no true home, no future, no husband to protect you, no children to love and caress? What father would doom his child to so cheerless a destiny?"

But still she wept, and urged her pleading, and asked to be 'only his child.'

"It shall be so if you wish it," he replied, whilst a change came over his features. "Yes, you shall be my adopted child, live with me, call me father, and bear my name. But do not deceive yourself, after this first moment of emotion, our intercourse must perforce grow cold and constrained. You are not of my blood or race: I have not known you as a child, and seen you growing up to what you are now. You were a woman when first we met, as a woman I have loved you, and that first impression I can never wholly efface. Believe me, the perfect freedom, the confidence, the unrestrained caress—these may not exist between us, these never do exist, save between those whom one blood unites. And yet, as I said, if you wish it, it shall be so, but I feel that this actual moment,—so pure, so delightful—once over, will never return again. You weep; am I grieving you, poor child! Well, if it must be, you need not speak; leave me quietly, silently; I shall understand. If not, remain thus: my child—my wife."

He told her to leave him, but an irresistible impulse made him only hold her more fast. He bent over her; his voice was moved and low; her hands lay clasped upon his shoulder, and her face lay hidden upon them. He heard, he felt her weeping, but she did not move; he thought she consented; a blessing passed his lips; he stooped to kiss her cheek, but she shunned the embrace; she slowly raised her head from his shoulder, yet did not raise her look; she disengaged herself from the arms that encircled her, and gently drew away from Monsieur de Sainville, until she stood free before him. He did not seek to detain her—he did not speak, but watched her silently and with a strange pang at his heart. She laid her folded hands on her bosom, and stood looking at him quietly.

"Monsieur de Sainville," said she, in a tremulous tone, "I do not think I am worth very much, and yet if you care for me, you may have me. I do not think I am a great prize to win, but if you do indeed value me, here I am."

He looked glad, wondering, but she knew the privileges of her sex too well not to reverse the sign he had chosen—not to leave his side when she gave herself for life—not to withhold as affianced bride the familiar caress freely yielded as daughter and child.

He took the hand which she held out to him. He vowed to love her through life with fidelity, tenderness and truth; to protect and cherish her with all

the watchful care of a father, all the love of a husband.

"And I, Armand," said she, looking up seriously into his face, "I vow to love, honour, and obey you, not by word of lip alone before the mayor or the priest, but with my whole heart, and in every action of my daily life."

This was their second betrothal. The promise of eternal affection she had once required now came unsought; the obedience he had once exacted was now yielded unasked. The thought struck them both; their looks met.

"The new love is more faithful and less exacting than the old, my child," said he, a little sadly.

But a glow rose to her cheeks.

"No, no, do not say that," she fervently exclaimed. "I cannot at least sever myself from a past with all its errors so dear and delightful. I would not have that past effaced; that love dead and forgotten; my heart clings to both as to a part of my being. Speak not of a new love; there is but one; a stream of living water that never ceased to flow; that is fresh and springing still. What is altered? do we speak, look, feel differently? See! I sit by your side as I sat before, many a time; that face at which I now look is not less kind than of yore. If there be a change, tell it me not; my eyes and heart are blind; I neither see nor feel it. Breathe not a doubt, not one. I feel in a divine dream; waken me not. Let me float down the current of destiny:

let me read the book of life slowly, page by page. If there be sorrow, faithlessness, and weariness of the heart in store for me, I shall at least have been happy for a few years; I shall have had my ray of sunshine, and many, God help them! see only the same bleak and desolate sky from the beginning to the end of their journey—speak not of change; I tell you there is none."

"Do you mean to say you are not improved?"

She looked at him with a smile.

"Not a bit. And you?" she added, after a pause.

"My poor child, I have no wish to deceive you. I certainly have not improved."

"To tell you the truth, I know it all; the whole town is full of stories concerning your amiability. You pass for a sort of Blue Beard, shut up in your château."

"Yes, I have grown morose."

"I saw it in your face the moment I entered the room;—yes, very morose, but I shall cheer you."

"And bitter, Petite."

"But I am so amiable! You look sceptical? Well, I have not been very amiable of late, but I will tell you why; one of your evil spirits—the spirit of cold pride—has been with me. It is gone now, gone for ever. I have been trying to be you, and have made myself very wretched. I must be myself back again—there is no remedy for it. I must be once more the foolish girl who quarrelled with Mademoiselle Dantin, and who very nearly

quarrelled with you the first time she entered this quiet library. She is very faulty; I know that, and yet she has her good points too. When she is perverse, bear with her, and when she is foolishly-trusting, chill not her faith with cold lessons, for it is in her nature—she must go on, deceived if you will, but still hoping and believing."

At first he did not reply, but he made her turn her flushed face to the fading light, and looked at her attentively.

"Petite," he said, "you have a curious charm. By what secret spell have you wound yourself around my heart—I need not tell you it is not very tender, or yielding by nature—so that it almost seems I cannot help liking you still, no matter what you do? I loved another woman once, very beautiful, very gentle, very winning, but she never had that power over me, and when I chose to cease loving her, she could not make me love on. Why is this?"

Nathalie smiled with a smile so bright and radiant, spite of that dusky room, that, like Una's angel face, it made for a moment

A sunshine in the shady place.

"Because," she replied, "I love with my whole soul, with my whole heart—that is the secret; you know it—there lies the charm."

CHAPTER XII.

The Canoness sat alone in her boudoir. She had been reading in her prayer-book, but it now lay closed on the table near her. She wept slowly; tears come not in old age with the same rapid gush with which they flow in youth. She felt sad and lonely. Her deafness had increased of late, and as she sat facing the window with her back to the door, she did not know that any one had entered, until her nephew stood by her chair. He took her hand, kissed it, and sat down by her side. Their intercourse had been cold and constrained of late; she felt this proof of returning affection, for her voice trembled a little as she said:

"How kind of you to come, Armand! I felt so dull."

"Your life is dull, aunt; you want some one—a companion."

The Canoness shook her head; her face became obscured. "She wanted no companion."

"Yes, aunt, you do; and I have found one for you."

"Indeed," she shortly replied.

"Yes, you will be charmed with the person I have chosen for you."

"I can choose for myself."

"Very well; I shall send word that she need not come."

He stretched his hand towards the bell-rope; his aunt detained him.

"Stay, Armand," she hesitatingly observed, "one must not send such a message; besides, what sort of a person is she?"

"A very agreeable person, aunt."

At the word agreeable, the Canoness took her attentive attitude, coughed, and fidgetted in her chair.

"Young?" she asked, pretending to look straight before her, but casting a stealthy glance at her nephew.

"Not twenty, I believe."

"Good-looking?" she asked, with the same look.

"She is very pretty."

"I will not have her!" decisively exclaimed the Canoness; "I will not have her!"

"But aunt ——"

"It is no use, Armand; I will not have her; not for worlds!"

"My dear aunt!"

"Not for worlds!" again exclaimed the Canoness, who seemed to be getting excited.

"But why so, aunt?"

"You are very inquisitive, Armand."

"I only want to know your reason for refusing."

"Well then, I refuse because——because it is no business of yours, Armand," was her abrupt conclusion.

"Aunt, see this person. She has a charming face, a thing you like."

"So do you," muttered the Canoness.

"Her society would delight you."

"And you also, no doubt," she observed, in the same tone.

"She would walk with you in the garden."

"Or meet monsieur, my nephew, there." This was uttered *sotto voce*.

"And spend the evening with you in this pretty boudoir."

"Which would be much prettier than now, of course," drily replied the Canoness, speaking aloud, for she was getting irritated.

"In short," calmly said Monsieur de Sainville, "it is so desirable a scheme that you will surely consent."

His aunt turned upon him indignantly.

"Armand," said she, drawing herself up, folding her arms, and sitting erect in her arm-chair, "am I or am I not a woman of penetration?"

"My good aunt!"

"No coaxing; am I or am I not a woman of penetration?"

"I never denied it, aunt; what about it?"

"Only this, Armand; the next time you lay your schemes, and think to make me the instrument; don't do it quite so openly. Do not, Armand," she feelingly added.

Monsieur de Sainville gravely inquired her meaning. But she shook her head, shut her eyes, and pursed up her lips. "She knew, but was not going to tell him; not she."

"I see, aunt, you are prejudiced against this poor girl."

The Canoness reclined back in her chair, and smiled ironically.

"How unjust! she has quite an affection for you."

"An affection!" Aunt Radegonde looked indignant.

"She has no greater desire than to spend the remainder of her days with you."

Aunt Radegonde looked confounded.

"She said she knew you needed her company."

"Company!—her company! Impertinent little thing!"

"Yes, she seemed quite confident about it."

The Canoness laid her folded hands on her knees, and turned her head from right to left, with a bewildered look.

"Little *intrigante!*" she exclaimed. More she

could not say; she was, to use a French expression, "*suffoquée.*"

"Indeed," quietly continued her nephew, "her kindly feeling towards you quite won my heart."

"Won his heart!" The Canoness looked at him with silent reproach.

"Oh! Nathalie, Petite, my good child, my dear little thing," she sadly said. "I knew you were forgotten. I did not know you would be so soon replaced."

Two large tears trickled down her cheeks. Monsieur de Sainville looked a little moved.

"Aunt," said he quietly, "look behind you."

The Canoness slowly turned round, and uttered a faint cry: in the shadow of the room behind her chair stood Nathalie, looking at her and laughing and crying, as she looked both at once. The poor Canoness remained mute; but the young girl stepped quickly round the chair, knelt on the floor, kissed the hands of her old friend, and passing her arms around her, clasped her slender little waist.

"Yes, Marraine," she said, laughing, but her eyes and cheeks still glittering with recent tears, "here is the impertinent little thing; the little *intrigante!* Well, why do you not send her away about her business at once?"

The Canoness shook away the tears that would gather in her eyes; she laid one hand on either shoulder of the young girl, stooped and kissed her heartily; her face beamed with joy. Monsieur de Sainville stood leaning against the back of his aunt's

arm-chair; he smiled as he looked on, with a purer joy and gentler emotion than any he had experienced for many a day. To receive happiness is delightful; to bestow it is blessed.

Five minutes had not elapsed before they all three looked very comfortable indeed. Nathalie sat on a low stool at the feet of the Canoness, and Monsieur de Sainville on a low couch by his aunt's side. The Canoness, like a practical little woman as she was, had, her first emotion over, exacted from Nathalie a solemn promise never to leave her again, which promise the young girl had yielded with a smile and a kiss. But though Aunt Radegonde ought now to have been quite happy, she did not seem so. She looked at Monsieur de Sainville; he had relapsed into his usual gravity; she glanced at Nathalie, the young girl seemed rather pensive. The Canoness smiled to herself with an air of much finesse, and felt that until *she* interfered, certain matters would never go right. She hesitatingly took her nephew's hand and held it fast between her slender little fingers, whose grasp he could with one effort have eluded; then she took Nathalie's hand and softly glided it into his; and holding those two hands firmly clasped within her own, she gave the owners a wistful and appealing look.

"Children," she began, but her voice faltered and died inarticulately away, whilst her eyes overflowed with tears—

"Come, aunt," quietly said Monsieur de Sainville, "be quite easy; Petite and I are friends."

"Thank heaven!" devoutly said the Canoness, much relieved. But in a few moments her fears and doubts returned. She looked inquiringly at her nephew and Nathalie. They looked calm and happy enough, but, with her usual penetration, Aunt Radegonde saw plainly all was not yet quite right.

"Armand," she said, very seriously, "do you think me a woman of experience, and will you take my advice?"

"That depends on the advice, aunt," he replied, with a smile.

"Armand," decisively said the Canoness, her heart beating, however, at the daring experiment she made, "Armand, marry Petite."

Her heart failed her; he did not answer; he looked grave, and she construed his gravity into displeasure.

"Armand," she said, with much emotion, "marry her; she loves you in her heart, she does. I never told you before, but I will tell you now, that when you were ill she stood at the door of your room pale and trembling, poor child, and when I went to whisper that you would not see her, she just bowed her head, and turning away, gave a look at that threshold which she might not cross—a look that almost broke my heart. I will not hush," said she, pushing away the hand which Nathalie quickly laid on her lips, "I will not hush! do you think I have nothing to say about him? do you think he has not longed to have his own Petite back again; ay, many

a time? Do you think he would not now give anything to have her sitting by his side, as she has sat so often? He would, child, he would, let him deny it if he can!"

He denied nothing. The Canoness who watched him eagerly, felt that the decisive moment was come. She rose from her seat, pale and trembling; she took Nathalie's hand and made her rise too; she led her to her nephew, and the young girl yielded to her blushing and docile.

"Why do you bring me this perverse little thing?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, trying to frown as his aunt and the young girl stood before him; but even as he spoke he fondly drew Nathalie towards him, and making her sit on the couch by his side, encircled her with one arm, and held her fast. She slightly drew away from him, and looked up into his face with a smile, half arch, half triumphant.

"You need not have this perverse little thing if you do not choose, sir," she said, in a light mocking tone. She made a motion to leave his side, but who shall say that in her heart she either cared to go, or thought he would let her depart. He did not, but complacently lifted up and smoothed back a disordered tress of her dark hair, whilst she, thus sitting by him, one hand lightly laid on his shoulder, looked at her old friend with happy and blushing pride.

The little Canoness stood before them, her eyes blinded by joyful tears. To her dying day this good creature will believe that she, and she alone,

reconciled them; and to her dying day Monsieur de Sainville, and she who is now his wife, will tenderly indulge her in the dear illusion.

"Ah! wise as he thinks himself, see how fondly he loves her!" thought Aunt Radegonde, as she resumed her seat, and thence watched them, smiling and elated at the submission of man's wisdom to woman's power. "Well, Monsieur Armand and Mademoiselle Petite," she observed aloud, "you may thank me for this."

Both looked up, and smiled at one another first, then at her.

"I wish," said her nephew, "you would tell Mademoiselle Petite to take off her scarf."

"Mademoiselle Dantin will scold if she remains too late," hesitatingly observed the Canoness, who held her sour-tempered neighbour in secret awe.

"Who cares about Mademoiselle Dantin?" was the irreverent reply. "Are you afraid of her, aunt?"

"No, indeed, Armand, but Petite——"

"Petite is greatly changed if she is afraid of anything or any one," interrupted Monsieur de Sainville.

Willing to convince him that no important change had taken place in her temper, Nathalie unfastened her scarf with silent deliberation, thus expressing her determination to remain, even at the imminent risk of rousing Mademoiselle Dantin's wrath. The Canoness shook her head, and said that, "if Mademoiselle Dantin was cross——"

"She will be delighted," interrupted her nephew.

Aunt Radegonde looked sceptical. "Mademoiselle Dantin detested to hear of those things."

"What things, aunt?" he gravely asked.

Aunt Radegonde bridled up. "People might make mysteries if they liked, but other people were neither deaf nor blind yet." He smiled.

"Well, aunt," said he, "to please you——"

"To please me, Armand!"

"I mean to please you and Petite."

"To please us! Armand, what do you mean?"

"Nothing, aunt, since it pleases no one."

The Canoness looked baffled. She liked explanations and little scenes of the pathetic kind: her nephew shunned and detested them. Nathalie, resuming her old place, whispered that he was only jesting.

"Very unbecoming jesting," stiffly said Aunt Radegonde.

But Monsieur de Sainville seriously declared this was no jest, but the conclusion of a very unbusinesslike interview which had formerly taken place between himself and Mademoiselle Montolieu concerning Mademoiselle Dantin's affairs. Nathalie, in a nettled tone, begged his pardon, and said that interview had struck her as very businesslike indeed. He reminded her, with a smile, that she had never mentioned the intended purchase of Madame Ledru, and the damages that disappointed lady claimed, and hoped she would not now forget to inform the schoolmistress that he had altered his mind, and, owing to her great talents

for business, had resolved to pay the required sum for the ricketty house and strip of garden.

"I shall say nothing of the kind," replied Nathalie, looking exactly as she formerly looked when he had said something to provoke her.

All that the Canoness understood was that Mademoiselle Dantin was fast leading to a quarrel it was high time for her to check.

"Armand," she said, with much stateliness, "I am the head of the family, am I not? Well, then, tell me your intentions with regard to Petite?"

"Aunt, what a needless question!"

"Indeed, no. In explanations one is supposed to know nothing, and I am not aware that I do know anything. Do you intend asking her to become your wife?"

"Yes, aunt, I do."

"Well, Petite," said the Canoness, looking down at Nathalie, "what will you answer?"

"I shall answer when I have been asked," was the demure reply.

"But, Petite, he means to ask you."

"So do I mean to reply."

The Canoness looked greatly provoked. "This came," she hotly said, "of having anything to do with lovers and their quarrels. They would still be at drawn daggers but for her, and instead of feeling grateful, they were in a plot to vex her." Her nephew suggested that she should begin over again;

but she indignantly refused. "They might manage their own affairs now." But when, in spite of her faint resistance, Monsieur de Sainville kissed her hand, and when Nathalie pressed her lips to the averted cheek, the placable Canoness, who longed to yield, allowed herself to be persuaded. She said "she was much too easy, but it was time all this should end;" therefore, beseeching her nephew "not to smile and Petite not to look foolish," she made a second trial, which met with exactly the same result as the first. Monsieur de Sainville would ask; Nathalie would reply when she had been asked.

"Again!" indignantly exclaimed the Canoness, and it took five minutes of coaxing on either side of her chair to soothe her offended dignity. At length she hit on an expedient.

In solemn and deliberate tone, and in the distinctly uttered name of Armand de Sainville, she asked Nathalie Montolieu in marriage; to which, in the name of the said Nathalie, she—after a pause given to that modest reflection suggested by propriety—uttered the most distinct and unequivocal "yes" maiden thus questioned ever spoke. She listened for a while to hear if any dissentient voice would be raised, but there was a profound silence.

"There!" she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief and a triumphant look, as she felt that the arduous matter was fairly settled. "There, it is all right,

now; but I should like to know how you would have managed without me. Ah! you may well smile and look glad, foolish children. But you need not think it is all over, you have to hear me yet."

Both smiled at the expected homily. But of this the Canoness remained unconscious: she glanced with a complacent smile from her nephew to the young girl, and nodding at them with that mingled *bonhomie* and innocent vanity which formed the basis of her character, she thus addressed them:

"Children, it is well to marry and be fond of one another, but that is not enough."

"How can you tell, aunt?" asked her nephew, "you were never married."

"But I have observed, Armand, observed a great deal. Pray do not interrupt me again. You see," she resumed, "little quarrels are dangerous; affection dies of those pricks of a pin. I do not tell you, Petite, to obey Armand; I think it very ridiculous that men should command and women obey: but you see, my dear, he is older than you are; he has more experience and judgment; it will be well to yield sometimes, for when a man takes a young wife, and is subject to her caprices, he loses the respect of the world. Now, Petite, you must be jealous of your husband's reputation and honour—both are your own; do not forget it. As for you, Armand, I only say this: a woman is not a stone, but somethingwith a heart. Be kind, and she will

do as you wish; command, and she will either brave or deceive you. In short," added Aunt Radegonde, warming with her subject, "behave to her like a Christian and a gentleman; not like a Turk."

Thus pithily closed Aunt Radegonde's homily.

CONCLUSION.

Six weeks had elapsed; to the profound amazement of the town of Sainville, and of the whole vicinity, Nathalie Montolieu had left the school of Mademoiselle Dantin for the château, and relinquished her maiden name for that of De Sainville.

This *mésalliance* was variously commented on. The general and most popular explanation was, that notwithstanding his years and experience, Monsieur de Sainville had allowed himself to be caught by a pretty face; ergo, that he was only a fool; and that though so young and seemingly heedless, Mademoiselle Montolieu was wonderfully expert in the difficult art of catching a rich husband. The tact with which she had transferred her designs from the nephew to hi wealthy uncle was especially admired. A few foolish and romantic people did indeed venture to hint that Monsieur de Sainville was perhaps as wise as Monsieur de Chateaufort, who had married a plebeian

dot of five hundred thousand francs, a plain person, and a sour temper; they even presumed to add that it was no actual crime to be young and pretty; and that a woman might love a man who happened to be rich and somewhat older than herself; but those persons were treated as such persons will be treated to the end of time: with the most entire contempt.

Every one, however, agreed in admiring the perfect unconcern with which Monsieur de Sainville and his wife endured the ironical surprise the announcement of their marriage had created, and it was decided on all hands that they had manifested a very fine *sang-froid.* But to this praise we regret to state that they were not entitled, having remained, not only unaware, but unsuspicious of the comments to which an event that appeared to them very simple and natural had given rise.

Monsieur de Sainville entertained for his own judgment, prudence, and forethought, that degree of respect with which most men are amply provided; it did not occur to him that he could do a foolish thing; he did not think he had done a foolish thing in marrying Nathalie, and consequently did not imagine that the world might probably be of another opinion. Nathalie came to the same conclusion from different grounds. She had so sincere a respect for her husband—apart from the love she felt—she held him so superior in everything to the younger men she had known, and they, to say the truth, were neither remarkable nor numerous, that

she would have listened with incredulous surprise to the accusation of interested motives preferred against her. It would have seemed to her that there could exist but one motive for marrying Monsieur de Sainville, and that this motive must be as apparent to every mind as it was to her own.

The six weeks which had elapsed had been marked by no important occurrence. There had, indeed, been some talk of one of those matrimonial tours of which the fashion, imported from England, has of late years become so prevalent in France; but Aunt Radegonde looked so perfectly miserable at the idea of remaining alone, Monsieur de Sainville evidently cared so little for this excursive sort of happiness awarded to the honeymoon, and Nathalie confessed so frankly that there was no place she liked so well as Sainville, that the plan was relinquished.

We know that a tale has, properly speaking, no right to extend beyond that fiat of a heroine's destiny, called marriage; and yet we must ask the reader to linger with us on the threshold of that old saloon into which he has so often been ushered, and to behold one last farewell picture.

Evening is drawing in. The chilly Canoness sits in her deep arm-chair by the fireside; Nathalie has been wrapping her up in a vast shawl, and placing a warm cushion under her little feet; they are alone.

"There," said Nathalie, in her cheerful voice, "you are quite right now, and can doze quietly."

"Doze, Petite; I wonder you can talk so child-

ishly," was the somewhat pettish reply; "how often must I tell you that I do not doze after dinner, that I am only in a reflective mood?"

"But, aunt, why do you shut your eyes?"

"Because the light annoys me, you simple little thing."

Nathalie turned her head away to hide a furtive smile as her aunt closed her eyes to prepare for her after-dinner reflections; her regular breathing soon announced that those reflections were at least of a placid nature. Nathalie stood awhile on the hearth and then glided softly to one of the windows. It was a calm and chill evening. The moon was rising, but as yet her light was grey and indistinct, and the trees of the avenue cast faint and undefined shadows on the ground. Beyond rose the massive iron gate; and farther still extended the white and lonely road, winding away amongst green fields and solitary homesteads. It was that road which Nathalie followed in its farthest windings, as she stood in the embrasure of the window, her brow resting against the clear window-panes, the heavy curtain shrouding her in.

She was dreaming; not the feverish dreams which had once flushed the cheek and haunted the heart of the ardent girl; not these. Womanhood's calmer and holier visions were now hovering around her, for she was happy. Happiness is not, after all, so rare as it has often been represented; it exists and is met with, but accompanied with doubts and fears, that

trouble its purest joys, and with sweet intoxicating hopes, that agitate still more deeply. It is the serene placid happiness that is a rare and brief sojourner on earth; the guest of a day, not so often banished by actual sorrow as the weariness of human hearts, too soon satiated with its pure and delightful presence. It was that still joy which now dwelt in the heart of Nathalie, and shed its divine peace over all her dreams. She did not feel hope, for hope implies desire, and every desire of her heart was fulfilled; she had not, as of yore, the longing wish to read and open the sealed book of the future; she had fixed her destiny on earth by solemn and irrevocable vows; and though she could not tell whether sorrow or happiness awaited her, she knew that there could be for her only one deep sorrow, even as there was only one deep happiness.

Of what, then, did she dream?

Of the quiet domestic joys of woman's household life; of her husband away, as he was this evening, and returning, as she expected he would return, on the morrow; of kind words and gentle caresses, of winter evenings by the fireside, of long summer mornings in the garden, and of a whole existence flowing on thus through years with the same calm and even tide. The change, the adventure, the romance she had oncelonged for no longer troubled her; the fever of her soul had won its long sought rest.

It was some time before she left the window and

returned to the hearth. The Canoness was in a deep sleep; the fire shone with a warm and vivid glow. Nathalie sat down on a low stool; she smiled even to herself as she remembered the winter evenings thus spent, with a book on her lap that still remained unread; and then came back the memory of doubt, sorrow, and separation, of griefs poured forth on a sister's bosom, of the voice which had ever cheered her with pure and holy counsels, of the calm death-bed, and of the lonely grave in the narrow church-yard of Sainville. So absorbed was she in those recollections that she never heard the sound of a horse's hoofs in the avenue, nor, after a while, the drawing-room door opening. It was Monsieur de Sainville who entered. He paused for a moment on the threshold and looked at his wife. The firelight fell on her features, youthful in spite of their present seriousness, and on her slender figure; her present attitude displaying more than usual its light girlish grace. Nathalie looked very pretty thus, and yet a strange pang shot across the bosom of Monsieur de Sainville as he gazed on her. He was still in the prime and vigour of life, but she was in all the early freshness of her years. It was not that he wished to add one day more to that existence as yet so brief, nor would he have seen without regret a severer line on that youthful brow; she charmed him thus, and, as he felt, charmed him only too well; but in spite of himself, the lingering doubt would intrude that a day might come when Nathalie would repent her

present choice, and wish she had chosen herself some younger mate.

He closed the door; Nathalie looked up, quickly rose to meet him, and there was something in the flush of glad surprise which lit up her face, in the irrepressible joy betrayed by every one of her expressive and animated features, that would have soothed a more irritable spirit, and charmed more painful doubts away. In youth, when the heart is naturally more generous, because it is more wealthy, the affection given is often the source of greater, and certainly purer happiness than the love received; but as years steal on, as the heart, like a prodigal spendthrift, grows poor, selfish, and wearied, nothing can exceed the eager delight with which it receives the slightest tokens of a pure and sincere affection. This is a weakness against which judgment avails little, and bygone experience still less. Few had become more sceptical of human affections than Monsieur de Sainville; few had been more justified in their scepticism, and yet none, perhaps, ever yielded with more facility than he did to the pleasure of watching every emotion of the love he had at first unconsciously inspired, and then sedulously fostered in the heart of the young girl now his wife.

As he took a seat quietly, in order not to awaken his aunt, and Nathalie placed herself on the low stool at his feet, she did not say his unexpected return pleased her, but her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, the volubility of her piquant speech, the

very restlessness of her movements, betrayed her joy; unexpressed, indeed, but to him how legible in the radiant face now raised towards his! And it was not merely the gladness his return inspired that pleased him, but still more the facility with which this Provençal nature yielded to pleasurable emotions, ever displaying that singular aptitude for happiness, if we may for once borrow a French idiom, which had struck and charmed him from the first.

To those who have lived much, whether prematurely or in the natural course of years, there is a deep attraction in the vivacity and buoyancy of younger minds and hearts. A placid, serene woman, far more perfect than Nathalie, would have failed in awakening the same feeling in Monsieur de Sainville, who was himself calm enough not to need that soothing but somewhat chill influence. Nathalie was to him as is to a traveller the summer breeze, —keen, fresh, and vivifying, but never cold, which tempers the fervid heat of noonday, and banishes the evening weariness of limbs and spirit.

She had ceased speaking, perhaps because she feared to awaken the sleeping Canoness; perhaps because other thoughts had come to her. Monsieur de Sainville bent down and looked into her face; the fire-light shone brightly on it; it was somewhat serious, yet no sad thoughts seemed to trouble her as she sat there on the hearth, her look on the glowing embers, her hands clasped around her knees.

"What are you thinking of?" asked her husband, placing his hand lightly on her shoulder.

She looked up slowly, and as slowly smiled.

"I was thinking," she replied, "that it is now two years since I entered this house—this room—and sat down where I am sitting now; strange that it should have taken two entire years to make me so happy."

"You are happy, then?"

"Very happy."

"And you have no doubt—no fear?"

"None—why should I?"

He looked at her almost sadly, but her smile remained bright, trusting, and undismayed.

"You are the same as ever," said he, "too hopeful. Come, confess that you look upon life, married life in particular, as a sort of perpetual sunshine."

"I think no such thing," was the dry and decisive reply; "I think, on the contrary, that it is extremely stormy."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed; but I have resolved one thing."

"And pray what is that thing?"

"That you shall have all the storms to yourself. You need not smile ironically: calm as you are, you know that I have found the way of putting you out of temper."

"Yes, Petite; but you were first very much out of temper yourself; if, therefore, the storms you predict take place, you will be ——"

"A Griselidis—all patience, meek submission, and dutiful obedience."

A sceptical smile betrayed the doubt with which Monsieur de Sainville was disposed to treat this assertion; but Nathalie persisted.

"Indeed it will be as I say; and that because I know it will vex you thoroughly."

"This sounds frank; but pray how do you know it will vex me?"

"Because you like resistance, provided you can conquer it in the end; because you would wish me to storm, fret, and quarrel, whilst you remained cool as an icicle, and consequently always master. But as I am resolved not to give you this gratification, I have taken a dose of patience sufficient to last me through life."

"Well, since you confess to the amiable motive of wishing to vex me, I begin to believe this may be true."

"And you will give me credit for no other motive," asked Nathalie, a little seriously. "You do not think I could be patient from reason and principle if you happened to be stern and exacting; you do not think I could separate love from temper, and whilst I trusted in one, find it easy to endure the other?"

"Would you do that, Petite?"

"Yes, Armand, I would; for indeed you may believe me, mine is no weak and passing affection. I know that you are human, and that you have

humanity's weaknesses; but I know also that you are upright and true; and if I love you much, I revere you not less. You need not look at me so wistfully; I cannot, I will not doubt. I said it already, this is no passing affection: it will not end with a few years; it will not be conquered by sorrow or death; it is as much a part of my being as is the immortal spirit within me, and like it, will it survive the storms and trials of existence, and pass beneath the dark portal of death to rejoice in the life and light of a purer day."

She ceased—tears had gathered in her dark eyes, and her smiling and parted lips quivered slightly. He made her no reply, but bending over her he laid his hand caressingly on the glossy and wavy tresses, and drew nearer to him that bowed and submissive head.

We will leave them thus. The Canoness is plunged in her deepest and most reflective mood; a mood which, alas! grows deeper and longer every evening; the wood-fire is burning brightly on the hearth; it lights the room with a warm genial glow; twilight has deepened into dusk; the red curtain is still undrawn; through the clear window-panes are seen the dark trees of the avenue; they rise against a sky of night's deepest azure; over all shines the moon—large, full, and radiant—her soft, clear light glides in through the casement, and falls upon the floor; it contrasts, but does not blend, with the red firelight.

And no other light seems to be needed for the sleep of age, or the dreams of love and youth. But, alas! there is only one there who is dreaming now: Monsieur de Sainville is indeed looking at his wife with true and serious tenderness; he loves her and has faith in her love; but he has not lived in vain; he knows the fallacy of hope, the weakness of humanity; the perishable nature of its deepest feelings; the freshness of Nathalie's hopes, the fervour of her faith cannot exist for him; and yet he is happy, for he can say "sufficient to each day is the evil thereof," and whilst the glad present shines over him, he will not sadden it with thoughts of the morrow's gloom.

But she who now sits at his feet with brow so serene, smile so hopeful, and look that seems to welcome such glorious visions,—has she those doubts, those fears? She has not.

"Hope with eyes so fair"

never wore a brighter aspect, when the poor poet, who died of grief, first beheld her. And hope is with her now; her glance undimmed by weeping, her beacon-light unquenched by the heavy night shadows. Nathalie is young; barely has she seen twenty years; she has suffered, but she forgets her past sorrow, to gaze on the future; it is beautiful and bright; she sees it as clearly as the light reflected in the mirror before her. She has heard that happiness is transient, that love is as delusive as the dream of

a night; but the voice in her heart tells her another tale. Where others have found sorrow, she shall have deep joy, for Nathalie believes; her look, her attitude, are the very sublime of faith; there is not the shadow of a doubt on that clear brow, not the most remote mistrust in that upturned gaze. She is happy, and happy indeed does she look, sitting there at his feet, secure in the might and faith of her undying love.

Long may those bright hopes and warm feelings remain with her; long may they linger near her household hearth, and hallow it with their pure presence!

THE END.

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